



## Recognition at last

Amy Jackson says it's inspiring to see actresses playing impactful roles rather than being relegated to glamour

LEISURE | P2



## Meeting postponed

A meeting between the PML-N and PPP coordination committees, which was expected to take place Friday, has been postponed

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## From Paytm to Axis

Paytm shifts its nodal account to Axis Bank from Paytm Payments Bank as RBI extends deadline to stop all transactions

BUSINESS | P11



## Historic medal assured

Indian women shuttlers assure themselves a historic first-ever Badminton Asia Team C'ships medal defeating Hong Kong

SPORTS | P12

## Naveen lays stone for projects worth ₹87,500 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Paradip, Feb 16: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Friday laid the foundation stone for three major projects worth ₹87,500 crore, including a mega integrated steel facility by JSW Utkal Steel Limited.

The two other projects are Re-New E-Fuels Private Limited's ₹22,000 crore green ammonia plant and Silox India Private Limited's chemical factory worth ₹500 crore, according to a CMO statement.

The three projects together are expected to generate employment for 34,810 people.

While JSW Utkal Steel Ltd will set up a 13.2 MTPA integrated steel plant at Dhinka (the earlier controversial site of South Korean steel major Posco) on the outskirts of the port township of Paradip in Jagatsinghpur, Re-New E-Fuels Private Limited has proposed to set up a 1.195 MTPA green ammonia plant and Silox India Private Limited to establish a 25,000 MTPA chemical factory.

The Sajjan Jindal-led company had in 2022 announced an investment of ₹65,000 crore in a greenfield mega steel project, which is likely to generate employment for 30,000 people in a phased manner.

"I am happy to lay the foundation stone for JSW's mega steel plant, the green ammonia plant and the chemical plant. The complex has brought an investment of about ₹90,000 crore for Odisha," Patnaik said while thanking the industrialists for making these investments.

Patnaik emphasised the government's commitment to leveraging such partnerships to create high-skill job opportunities for the youth of Odisha.

"Today, Paradip has emerged as one of the most attractive investment regions in the country. The cluster of industries and the port is making Paradip the fulcrum of industrial and commercial activities in the Bay of Bengal region," the CM said.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Sorry, but we do not accept cheques from the opposition. Who knows when your bank accounts might be frozen

## MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	CHANGE	PERCENTAGE
SENSEX	72426.64	↑ 376.26	0.52%
NIFTY	22040.70	↑ 129.90	0.59%
DOLLAR	83.03	↓ ₹0.03	-0.36%
EURO	89.50	↑ ₹0.24	0.27%
GOLD	₹61,509	↓ ₹113	-0.18%
SILVER	₹71,070	↓ ₹51	-0.07%

## WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	33.0°C	31.6°C
Min Temp	19.2°C	18.2°C
Humidity	70%	75%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

DRY WEATHER VERY LIKELY



TESTING TIMES: Students appear for Plus-II examination at Rama Devi Higher Secondary School, Friday

PIC: BIKASH NAYAK

# ₹1K to each SHG member

CABINET APPROVES FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR UNIFORMS TO 70 LAKH WOMEN SHG MEMBERS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 16: About 70 lakh self-help group (SHG) members in Odisha will get assistance of ₹1000 each for uniforms while 1.5 lakh Executive Committee (EC) members and Management Committee (MC) members will get assistance of ₹2000 each for blazers.

The decision to provide the financial assistance to the SHG members, EC and MC members was taken at a Cabinet meeting Friday chaired by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

Addressing reporters after the Cabinet meeting, Chief Secretary PK Jena said that Odisha has set a vibrant model of women empowerment under the 5T govern-



SHG member will be provided to purchase uniforms of choice as per their group decision. A budgetary allocation of ₹730 crore has been made for the purpose during the FY 2023-24. Jena said that Odisha has set a vibrant model of women empowerment under the 5T govern-

ment model. The Mission Shakti, spearheaded by the CM, has evolved to empower women and redefine their societal roles, transforming SHGs into formidable forces driving economic growth and social change, he added.

The Cabinet also approved the implementation of the 'NUA-O

Scholarship' scheme for students of UG and PG courses. Under the scholarship, students across the state in state universities, government and non-government aided colleges including aided Sanskrit colleges and unaided private colleges taking admission through the Student Academic Management System (SAMS), a portal for admission, will get ₹9,000 (boys) to ₹10,000 (girls) per annum. Jena said.

Jena said the SC/ST students and children of construction workers pursuing UG/PG will get scholarships at higher rates of ₹10,000 and ₹11,000 for male and female students respectively. The scheme entails a total outlay of ₹3701.08 crores over 5 years from 2023-24 to 2027-28. P3

REUTERS

Moscow, Feb 16: Alexei Navalny, Russia's most famous opposition leader, died Friday after collapsing and losing consciousness at the penal colony north of the Arctic Circle where he was serving a long jail term, the Russian prison service said.

Navalny, 47, rose to prominence more than a decade ago by lampooning President Vladimir Putin and the Russian elite whom he accused of vast corruption, avarice and opulence. The Federal Penitentiary Service of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District said in a statement that Navalny 'felt unwell' after a walk at the IK-3 penal colony in Kharp, about 1,900 km north east of Moscow. He lost consciousness almost immediately, it said.

"All necessary resuscitation measures were carried out, which did not yield positive results. Doctors of the ambulance stated the death of the convict," the prison service said, adding that causes of death were being established. Putin has been told about Navalny's death, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. Putin, who is running for reelection in a month, was shown on a television clip visiting a factory in the Urals.

Supporters of Navalny said they could not confirm he was dead, but that if he was then they believed he had been killed.

"Russian authorities publish a confession that they killed Alexei Navalny in prison," Navalny aide Leonid Volkov



wrote on social media. "We do not have any way to confirm it or to prove this isn't true."

Condemnation quickly poured in from Western governments.

"Dreadful news about Alexei Navalny... If the report about his death in Russian prison is true it represents another terrible crime by Putin's regime," Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom said on X.

Navalny's lawyer was on his way to the 'Polar Wolf' prison in Kharp where Navalny died. Russian state television showed a press conference by the central bank. Russian newspaper editor and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dmitry Muratov told Reuters Friday the death of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny was 'murder', and said that he believed harsh treatment had led to his demise.

In an interview in Moscow in 2011, Navalny was asked by Reuters if he was afraid of challenging Putin's system.

"That's the difference between me and you: you are afraid and I am not afraid," he said. "I realize there is danger, but why should I be afraid?" P10

## SHORT TAKES

### Ashwin in 500 club

Rajkot: Ravichandran Ashwin Friday became the second Indian bowler after Anil Kumble to take 500 Test wickets during the third Test against England. Ashwin also became only the third off-spinner to achieve the feat and continues to be the second highest wicket-taker for India behind Kumble, who ended his career with 619 scalps. The 37-year-old reached the milestone on day two of the ongoing Test. He needed just one wicket for the feat and that came in the way of opener Zak Crawley, who mistimed a sweep which landed in the safe hands of Rajat Patidar at short fine leg. P12

## Relief to Cong after I-T freezes accounts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: The Congress' main bank accounts were frozen Friday over an income tax demand of ₹210 crore but an I-T appellate tribunal later allowed it to operate them pending a further hearing next week, a huge relief for the party which said the move had impacted all political activity.

Congress treasurer Ajay Maken, who had earlier addressed a press conference to announce that Income Tax authorities had frozen its accounts, said the tribunal has put a lien of ₹115 crore on its accounts and

the party has been allowed to spend over and above that.

Party leader Vivek Tankha, who appeared before the tribunal against the order, said he told the tribunal that the Congress would not be able to participate in the "festival of elections" if its accounts remain frozen. The tribunal will hear the matter next Wednesday before a final decision is taken on the matter. Several party leaders, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi, expressed their outrage and alleged that the government's move was an attack on democracy.

# Prized fossil of Italian Alps is mostly just black paint

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 16: A 280-million-year-old fossil, classified as a member of the reptile group, that has baffled scientists for decades may have been partly forged, according to new examination of the remnants.

The discovery, published in the journal Palaeontology, has led the team to urge caution in how the fossil is used in future research. Tridentinosaurus antiquus was discovered in the Italian Alps in 1931 and was thought to be an important specimen for understanding early reptile evolution.

Its body outline, appearing dark against the surrounding rock, was initially interpreted as



preserved soft tissues. This led to its classification as a member of the reptile group Protorosauria.

However, the new research reveals that the fossil renowned for

its remarkable preservation is mostly just black paint on a carved lizard-shaped rock surface.

The purported fossilised skin had been celebrated in articles and books but never studied in

detail. The somewhat strange preservation of the fossil had left many experts uncertain about what group of reptiles this strange lizard-like animal belonged to and more generally its geological history.

"Fossil soft tissues are rare, but when found in a fossil they can reveal important biological information, for instance, the external colouration, internal anatomy and physiology," said Valentina Rossi of University College Cork, Ireland (UCC).

"The answer to all our questions was right in front of us, we had to study this fossil specimen in details to reveal its secrets - even those that perhaps we did not want to know," Rossi said. The microscopic analysis

showed that the texture and composition of the material did not match that of genuine fossilised soft tissues.

Preliminary investigation using ultraviolet (UV) photography revealed that the entirety of the specimen was treated with some sort of coating material, the researchers said.

Coating fossils with varnishes or lacquers was the norm in the past and sometimes is still necessary to preserve a fossil specimen in museum cabinets and exhibits, they said.

However, the fossil is not a complete fake. The bones of the hindlimbs, in particular, the femurs seem genuine, although poorly preserved, the researchers said.



## BEING MARRIED IS LIKE A GENTLE BREEZE: SALMA

Actress Salma Hayek has said that being married is like a gentle breeze. The Mexican actress celebrated her 15th wedding anniversary with husband Francois-Henri Pinault. The *House of Gucci* star, 57, and the French businessman, 61, tied the knot on Valentine's Day in the most romantic city in the world, Paris, in 2009.

## BRAD PITT MOVES IN WITH GIRLFRIEND INES DE RAMON

Hollywood star Brad Pitt is said to be living with his girlfriend Ines de Ramon. The *Fight Club* actor, 60, was first linked to the jewellery executive, 34, in 2022. Multiple sources have now said that the pair has taken the huge step in their relationship, reports *Female First UK*.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com  
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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

#### ARIES

If you are involved in monetary matters, today you will find yourself weighing the benefits. A loan that you have applied for may be sanctioned. Look at a range of choices, says Ganesh, and you will end up feeling very happy about it.

#### TAURUS

Today you are going to focus on enhancing your looks and appearances, says Ganesh. Instead of trying to seek satisfaction from within yourself you will be flaunting your fine clothes, your hairstyles. A visit to a beauty parlour cannot be ruled out. Your new looks will make you tremendously confident and impressive and will make others see you in a new light.

#### GEMINI

The day promises sensitivity and compassion for you, predicts Ganesh. You may plan a trip with your family members. You may also invest your money in various financial companies, as securing the future of your family will be foremost on your mind.

#### CANCER

It is high time that you dedicated yourself to your work. If you are looking to try new things, today may not be a very good day to do so. Stick to doing things the way you have been doing them so far, advises Ganesh. All you need is a little attitude adjustment.

#### LEO

A challenging day awaits you. You will face some tensions and problems, however this doesn't mean you will not be able to complete all your work successfully. Your personal life will proceed as usual, however expectations from you at the work-front will increase. You need to maintain a balance between your home and work-place, says Ganesh.

#### VIRGO

Children will be a source of a lot of appreciation today, in and out of the classroom. Your logical abilities will become stronger. Ganesh advises you to stay peaceful, flow with the tide and enjoy yourself, regardless of what happens in the day.

#### LIBRA

Ganesh says today is a fortunate day for starting new work. You will win the hearts of everyone with your amazing charm. Your house and its arty interior decoration will impress people.

#### SCORPIO

Do your deeds and don't expect returns is what Indian mythology has taught us since time immemorial. Now, it's time to implement it, especially at work. You may have to wait a little longer in terms of your business and joint venture.

#### SAGITTARIUS

Good Samaritans around you may give unsolicited, but valuable advice. Take it as a hint, and consider it for your betterment. Take your decision after following the advice, and this may definitely yield benefits, says Ganesh.

#### CAPRICORN

Not everyday is the same day. And, today is one of those days when you feel extremely confused, feels Ganesh. While you won't be able to get rid of negative emotions, your hard work will be paid off and lay a strong foundation for future. You'll not understand whether to feel good about your achievements or experience sadness of confusion.

#### AQUARIUS

There are no short-cuts to success. You know this very well and work you socks off to get what you want. Colleagues, friends and family - all of them will acknowledge and appreciate your efforts and achievements.

#### PISCES

Interactions with those of the opposite sex will mark your day. It is also a good day to strike up friendship with those of the opposite sex. For those in love, today is a good day to spend time with your partner. For those looking for love, now is the best time to pop the question to that special someone you've secretly admired for long, says Ganesh.

## 'Evolution of women in action movies inspiring'

**New Delhi:** Actress Amy Jackson said that the evolution of women in action films is inspiring as they are not just relegated to glamour.

"It's inspiring to see actresses now portraying strong, impactful roles rather than just being relegated to glamour," according to the *Ekk Deewana Tha* actress.

Amy, who made her debut in 2010 with the Tamil film *Madrasapattinam* minced no words when she said that women want to be represented as an equal to male actors on screen. "Women of all ages want to

feel represented on screen and to be seen an actress embodying a role rather than just popping up as eye candy is crucial to equality in cinema," she added.

In the upcoming film directed by Aditya Datt, Amy along with her co-stars Viduy Jammwal, Arjun Rampal and Nora Fatehi will be seen doing deadly stunts.

Working with Viduy was a safe experience for Amy.

"Working alongside such a maestro feels not only safe but got me immersed in the thrill, guided by a phenomenal choreographer," said the actress. IANS



## Kavita Chaudhary of Udaan fame no more

**Mumbai:** Actress Kavita Chaudhary, who is known for playing the role of an IPS officer in the television show *Udaan*, passed away after suffering a cardiac arrest.

The actress, who was battling poor health for a long time, died in Amritsar. Her last rites were performed Friday morning.

As per media reports, she breathed her last at Parvati Devi Hospital in Amritsar where she was being treated.

*Udaan*, which was written and directed by Kavita herself, aired in 1989. The show was based on the life of her sister Kanchan Chaudhary Bhattacharya, who became the second IPS officer of the country after Kiran Bedi.

Kavita inspired a lot of young women as at the time there was very less female representation in the police force. *Udaan* gained immense popularity and made her a household name. The show was re-least on Doordarshan during COVID-19 pandemic. IANS

## Death threats for Dua Lipa, Bella Hadid & Mia Khalifa

**Los Angeles:** Singer Dua Lipa, model Bella Hadid and former pornstar Mia Khalifa have received death threats in an Israeli song.

Named Ness Ve Stilla, the Israeli hip-hop duo called for the death of the stars on their song titled Harbu Darbu, which was actually released in December 2023.

The song, which now takes the top spot on Israel's Mako chart, criticised celebrities who publicly showed support for Palestine. The rappers fired off an apparent kill list of people whom they hold accountable for the October 7 attack, re-

ports aceshowbiz.com.

While Lipa and Hadid have yet to comment, Khalifa took to her X account to address the Hebrew track shortly after its release.

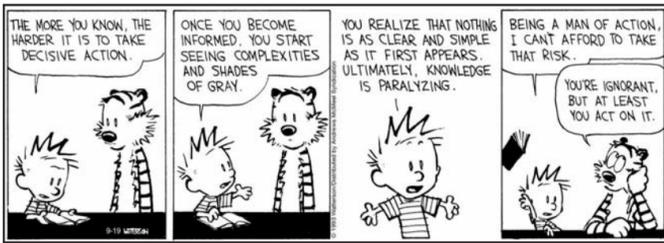
"Y'all that song calling for the IDF to kill me, Bella, and Dua is over a DRILL beat, they can't even call for genocide in their own culture, they had to colonise something to get it to #1," the former porn star wrote at the time. Lipa, who is British-Albanian, and Bella, who is of Palestinian descent, have always been open with their support for Palestine in the Hamas-Israel conflict. IANS



### PEANUTS



### CALVIN AND HOBBS

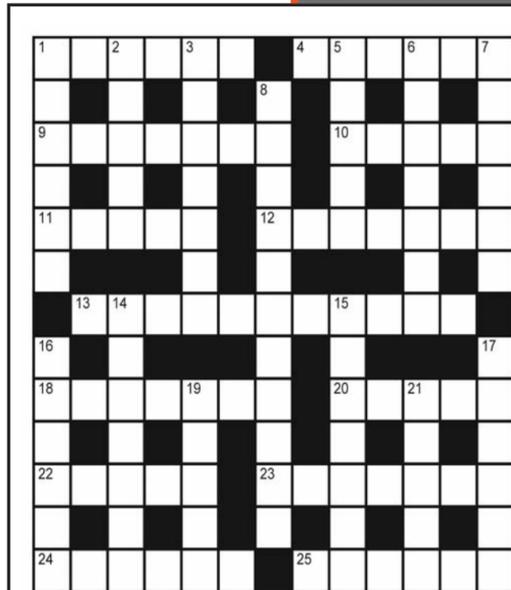


### BREVITY



### FUN post

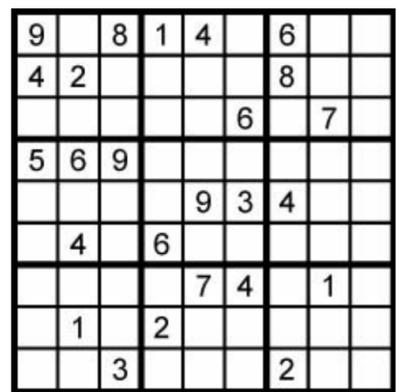
### CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Sensual
  - 4 Japanese island
  - 9 Advent
  - 10 Macaroni shape
  - 11 An alloy of iron
  - 12 Role player
  - 13 Education
  - 18 British lottery
  - 20 Sports stadium
  - 22 Welsh dog
- Down**
- 1 Thin
  - 2 Supersized
  - 3 Small stream
  - 5 Blatant
  - 6 Siberian winters, e.g.
  - 7 Foolish
  - 8 Enjoyable
  - 14 8, for one
  - 15 Chemical weapon (4,3)
  - 16 Plaster
  - 17 Security
  - 19 Aromatic vegetable
  - 21 Hot, glowing remnant

### SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.

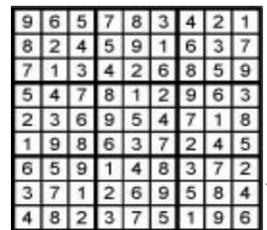


### SOLUTIONS

#### CROSSWORD



#### SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

# downtown

## Mahanga double murder: HC judge recuses from hearing

**Cuttack:** In significant development, a Orissa High Court judge, hearing a criminal revision petition filed by MLA Pratap Jena in connection with sensational Mahanga double murder, recused himself from the case, Friday. However, the court restored the interim protection granted to Jena. High Court sources said that following the development, the Chief Justice is likely to transfer the hearing to another division bench after scheduling the case. On October 31, Jena had filed a criminal revision petition in the High Court challenging the Salipur JMFC Court's summons for personal appearance in connection with the double murder case. During hearing, the High Court had issued notices to the state government and Ranjit Baral, respondents to the petition, November 2. Along with that, the High Court had summoned records from the lower court while passing an interim order prohibiting any coercive action against the MLA. It may be recalled, BJP leader Kulamani Baral and his associate Dibyasingh Baral were brutally murdered in Mahanga January 2, 2021. Following the double murder, complaints of the involvement of Jena, a minister then, had been made. The local police had reportedly dropped Jena's name from the FIR. Jena had failed to appear before the lower court despite directions to that effect.

# CM launches LAccMI in six more districts

As many as 238 buses will connect 1,363 gram panchayats of Khurda, Puri, Kendrapara, Bhadrak, Jajpur and Nayagarh districts

hance connectivity across 154 gram panchayats. Over 15 lakh people of the region will be benefited from the affordable bus service.

As many as 54 buses (44 non-AC and 10 AC) will improve connectivity across 433 gram panchayats of Puri – the abode of Lord Jagannath and one of the biggest tourist destinations of eastern India, benefitting over 14 lakh people of the region.

In a boost to Kendrapara's connectivity, a fleet of 43 LAccMI buses (35 non-AC and eight AC) will improve road communication across 196 gram panchayats. The state government's move will benefit at least 11 lakh people of the region.

In Bhadrak, a fleet of 31 buses (25 non-AC and six AC) will improve connectivity across 158 gram panchayats, benefitting over 15 lakh people of the district.

A fleet of 46 buses (37 non-AC and nine AC) will boost the connectivity across 233 gram

panchayats in Jajpur. In Nayagarh, 29 non-AC buses and seven with AC will connect 189 gram panchayats. State government's affordable bus service will benefit over 20 lakh people in both the districts.

On February 12, Patnaik launched the affordable bus service in Mayurbhanj, Bolangir, Bargarh, Keonjhar and Sundargarh districts. As many as 425 buses will ply on different routes in 1,457 panchayats, benefitting more than 90 lakh people in these districts.

The affordable bus service was first launched in Malkangiri district on October 12, 2023. It was later extended to Gajapati district (October 20), Kalahandi district (November 1), Rayagada district (November 25), Nabarangpur district (November 30), Koraput district (December 14).

The services were further extended to Deogarh, Angul and Dhenkanal districts January 31.



**CONNECTIVITY BOOST:** Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, in presence of 5T and Nabin Odisha Chairman Kartik Pandian, flags off affordable bus service under LAccMI for six districts, Friday

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** State government's historic rural-to-urban connectivity scheme, Location Accessible Multimodal Initiative (LAccMI), now covers 20 districts with Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik launching the affordable bus service in six more districts – Khurda, Puri, Kendrapara, Bhadrak, Jajpur and Nayagarh, Thursday.

As many as 238 buses will connect 1,363 gram panchayats of the six districts, benefitting over 60 lakh people.

In Khurda, a fleet of 28 buses (22 non-AC and six AC) will en-

# ₹1,412cr to revamp heritage sites, temples

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** The state Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, approved an outlay of ₹1412.79 crore under 'Integrated Development of Heritage Monuments and Tourist Destination (IDHMTD)' in a bid to preserve and revitalise heritage monuments and temples.

Official sources said 159 projects have been taken up under the scheme that would help reflect Odisha's unique character by encouraging integrated development of an aesthetically appealing, accessible, informative and secure environment, combined with efficient public facilities and infrastructure.

The scheme will be implemented from 2020-21 to 2026-27.

## 7,142 Accountant-cum-DEO posts

The Cabinet also approved creation of as many as 7,142 'Accountant-cum-Data Entry Operator' posts.

According to sources, the state has a total of 6,794 gram panchayats (GPs). "There is devolution of funds under CFC and SFC grants along with various other state and Union government flagship programmes to GPs for implementation of several schemes at the GP level.

"7,142 Accountant-cum-Data



**CABINET DECISIONS**

Entry Operators – Accountant-cum-DEO – will work under the administrative control of the GPs," an official said, adding that the decision will facilitate better, effective and timely regulation of official transactions, documentation of records, and financial management of various schemes.

To make GP offices more vibrant and viable, a new rule – Accountant-cum-Data Entry Operator (Method of Recruitment and Conditions of Service) Rules, 2022 – has been framed.

As per the rules, 70 per cent of sanctioned posts of Accountant-

cum-Data Entry Operators shall be filled up by direct recruitment through an independent body – Odisha Sub Ordinate Staff Selection Commission. The rest 30 per cent of sanctioned posts of Accountant-cum-Data Entry Operators shall be filled up by absorbing the eligible Gram Rojgar Sevaks (GRSs) in the same with certain terms and conditions keeping in view the work experience of GRSs at the GP level.

"But as a one-time measure, the GRSs, who have been selected under the MGNREGA scheme on a contract basis and have completed five years of continuous service and are otherwise

eligible, shall be absorbed against existing vacancies," said the official.

In another decision, the Cabinet has approved the creation of Odisha Culture Development Service (OCDS) Cadre in the process of restructuring Odisha Culture Service Cadre.

Official sources said the creation of OCDS will attract high quality professionals to the culture sector for the promotion, protection, and conservation of Odia Language, Literature and Culture with overall cultural growth of the state.

Such cadre will ensure better management of the dedicated schemes taken up by the department.

The Cabinet also approved the creation of the posts of Culture Development Officer, Assistant Director, Culture, Deputy Director, Culture, Joint Director Culture, and Additional Director, Culture in the OCDS Cadre.

This will enrich the culture and heritage of the state and will meet the requirements of the required human resources.

There will be annual provision of an additional amount of approximately ₹2.17 crore to meet the expenditure of the OCDS Cadre restructuring, official sources said.

## KHANDAGIRI TRIPLE MURDER CASE

# Life term for Sneha Swakhyar

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** Ten years after the chilling triple murder of a doctor, his assistant and the latter's minor son in Khandagiri area sent shockwaves across the state, the District and Sessions Court here Friday sentenced the solitary accused to rigorous imprisonment for life.

Judge Debasis Rout also slapped a fine of ₹10,000 on convict Sneha Swakhyar Samal who will have to undergo one year additional sentence on failure to furnish the amount.

The incident dates back to October 14, 2014, when Samal, a medicine representative by profession, walked into the house of the victim, Atulya Meher, an orthopedic surgeon, and stabbed him and two more including his caretaker Prashant Chandra Behera and the latter's minor son Munu, to death.

On the fateful day, Samal entered Meher's double storeyed building in Khandagiri Vihar area in the early hours with a bouquet and a bag in hand. He concealed the murder weapon (a knife) in the bag.

Public prosecutor Chandrakant Das said Samal told the caretaker's wife, Kunu



**I expected nothing less than death penalty for a demon like Samal. I have undergone tremendous trauma and misery in all these years. Mere life sentence has not done justice to my pain and sufferings**

KUNU BEHERA

Behera that he wanted to meet Meher and her husband, Prashant.

Moments later, Kunu informed Prashant about a man wanting to meet him. Prashant then went downstairs. After a while, Kunu heard loud cries for help coming from the ground floor. When Kunu went down to inquire, she found Prashant, Munu and Meher lying in pools of blood.

Kunu too sustained grievous injuries when she put up a fight

to stop a fleeing Samal. Upon hearing Kunu's screams, locals gave Samal a chase and caught hold of him with the blood-stained knife.

Apart from awarding life imprisonment under IPC Section 302, the court also found Samal guilty under IPC Section 307 (attempt to murder) and handed down an additional jail-term of 7 years, and imposed a fine of ₹5,000, failing which would undergo a jail-term of 6 months. All the sentences run concurrently.

Public Prosecutor Sahoo said a total of 26 witnesses were examined in the protracted legal battle in the court which continued for nearly a decade.

Kunu is a home guard, presently posted in Khandagiri Police Station, while Meher's widow is now living in the US with her elder daughter.

# Plus II exam begins at 1,160 centres

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** The annual Plus-II examinations, conducted by Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE), Odisha commenced across the state Friday, an official said.

A total of 3,84,597 students in Arts, Science and Commerce streams are appearing for the exams, which began at 10am.

The exams are being held in 1,160 centres, most of which are under CCTV surveillance, said CHSE examination controller Ashok Nayak.

In addition, the School and Mass Education (S&ME) department has formed squads at the district, zonal, and CHSE levels to monitor the exams and prevent any irregularities.

Nayak said permanent squads of the department have been deployed in Angul, Keonjhar and Koraput for the entire duration of the exams to ensure prompt movement to the exam centres in remote areas of the district in case of irregularities. The exams will end March 20.

Candidates have been advised to arrive at the centres 30 minutes before the start of the exam. Question papers will be distributed five minutes before the exam, he said.



**MAGHA MELA:** 'Sadhus' on way to Khandagiri hills for Magha Mela, in Bhubaneswar, Friday

# Docs treat man with 5 in 1mn heart disease

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Mumbai, Feb 16:** A team of doctors here achieved a remarkable breakthrough in treating a 35-year-old man with an extremely rare heart disease that occurs in only 5 in 1,000,000 people in Asia.

The patient, Raj Gorsa, a bank employee, was brought to Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre in Mumbai after experiencing unusual symptoms such as chest pain, severe palpitations, and blackouts while working, November 10, last year.

After a series of tests, doctors identified that Raj had recurrent ventricular tachycardia – a potentially dangerous cardiac rhythm disorder.

As initial attempts with medications did not improve Raj's condition, the doctors resorted to automated implantable cardioverter defibrillator (AICD) implantation.

Further investigations by cardiac MRI and PET scan and biopsy of his neck node revealed he suffered from a combination of cardiac tuberculosis (TB) – a common respiratory problem that rarely affects the heart – and cardiac sarcoidosis – a rare inflammatory illness that affects the heart muscle.

The patient did not have any

previous history of tuberculosis. In a hospital statement, the doctors stated that the prevalence of cardiac sarcoidosis and tuberculosis simultaneously in Asians is five in one million cases.

They noted that the condition can be a frequently missed diagnosis given its rarity and the high index of suspicion needed to make the diagnosis.

"Myocardial tuberculosis is an exceptionally rare form of extrapulmonary TB with few cases reported world-wide. Sarcoidosis (CS) is a multisystem granulomatous inflammatory disease with formation of non-caseating granulomas (lumps of proteins) of unknown aetiology," said Dr Rahul Chhabria, the Primary Cardiologist, in the statement.

"Sarcoidosis is a rare heart disease that results from the immune system to overreact causing lumps of tissues (granulomas) in the heart muscle. Primary treatment for cardiac sarcoidosis is immunosuppression with corticosteroids with the goal of reducing inflammation and fibrosis, thereby preventing disease progression. Tuberculous Myocarditis is treated with a combination of four anti-TB drugs to achieve disease control. Raj was started on steroids and anti-TB drug treatment," the doctor explained.

# EC team takes stock of poll preparedness



measures to prevent the flow of black money. He also called for strict implementation of the Supreme Court's judgement on electoral bonds. Ray claimed that a number of people's names had been deleted from the voters' list without notice, which he deemed unjust. He requested the commission to immediately address this issue. The commission also held detailed discussions with district Collectors-cum-district election officers and other officials responsible for election management in the state. They assessed various aspects including the readiness of electronic voting machines (EVMs), voter demographics, training status of election staffers, and infrastructure setup at polling booths. The high-level delegation comprised Chief Election Commissioner Kumar, Election Commissioner of India Arun Goel, Senior Deputy Election Commissioners Dharmendra Sharma and Nitesh Vyas, Deputy Election Commissioner Manoj Kumar Sahu, Director General of Media and B Narayanan. Chief Electoral Officer of Odisha and additional chief secretary to state government Nikunja Bihari Dhal and additional chief electoral officer N Thirumala Naik were also part of the review meeting.

decision on complaints by opposition parties ahead of the Lok Sabha and state polls.

The party also urged the EC to ensure hassle-free implementation of ongoing welfare schemes and projects before the model code of conduct kicked-in. BJP leader Purna Chandra Mallick, who attended the meeting on behalf of the party, submitted a petition to the commission to address their complaints of alleged booth rigging by the BJD during elections. Congress leader Sibananda Ray emphasised the importance of a free and fair election and urged the commission to take

The main focus was on upholding the election Model Code of Conduct and ensuring a smooth electoral process

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** An Election Commission of India (ECI) delegation led by its chief Rajiv Kumar Friday held meetings with representatives of various political parties, district Collectors and officials here to discuss poll preparedness in Odisha, an official said. During the meeting, the commission sought the views and concerns of representatives from national and regional parties. The main focus was on upholding the election Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and ensuring a smooth electoral process. Each party was given ample opportunity to present their perspectives and concerns to the commission, the official added. After the meeting, BJD national spokesperson Sanjiv Misra told reporters that they had requested the ECI to consider their views before taking any



**ROAD BLOCKADE:** Members of Domestic Workers' Union, State Committee, block National Highway-16 near Nayapalli Square in Bhubaneswar, Friday, as part of 'Bharat Bandh' called by central trade unions

# Crorepati Boudh RTO put behind bars

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** Vigilance sleuths Friday arrested regional transport officer (RTO) of Boudh Basanta Kumar Mohapatra on charges of possessing disproportionate assets (DA), stated to be 445 per cent of his known sources of income. Mohapatra was sent to jail by a Special Vigilance court here later in the day. He was arrested following a series of raids Thursday, said Vigilance sources. Searches on Mohapatra's properties detected DA, including two high-value flats and two commercial shopping outlets in



in Bhubaneswar, Boudh, and Ganjam Thursday. The anti-corruption wing officials also searched Mohapatra's official chamber at Boudh RTO office, a rented house at Bhanjanagar in Ganjam district and a relative's house at Berhampur in Ganjam, an official said. The current market value of immovable properties in possession of Mohapatra will be around ₹14.5 crore while other assets, including deposits, gold and silver ornaments and household articles are estimated to be valued at ₹4.5 crore. According to Vigilance officials, the current value of Mohapatra's assets would be about ₹19 crore. Notably, Mohapatra had joined the Transport department as a mechanical engineer in 1991. He was promoted to the rank of junior motor vehicle inspector (MVI) in 2014 and worked in the Balasore, Koraput, Bargarh and Gajapati districts. He was promoted to the rank of MVI and posted at Bhubaneswar in 2021. He has been working as RTO, Boudh since May 1, 2022.

# CARE holds workshop on cardiac health



**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** To mark the Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week, CARE Hospitals organised a walkathon and the patient experience workshop 'CARE Connect' to create awareness about early detection and treatment of congenital heart defects (CHDs) and shed light on patient lifestyle post cardiac intervention. At the workshop, MP Tripathy, clinical director and head of the cardiology department, spoke about the specialised care provided at CARE Children Heart Institute, a dedicated section under CARE Hospitals that treats heart diseases in newborns, infants and adolescents. Tripathy emphasised the hospital's advanced technological capabilities in treating various forms of rare heart diseases in children. Similarly, Prashant Prakash Rao Patil said, "CHDs, present at birth, vary in severity and require immediate attention. Early detection and treatment significantly improve prognosis and reduce complications for individuals born with CHDs".

## STATE ADVISORY BOARD MEET

# Shradhalayas for PwDs operational in 8 dists

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** Integrated Infrastructure Complexes (Shradhalayas) for persons with disabilities (PwDs) have become operational in eight districts while State Institute for Disability Rehabilitation (Manodaya) is functional at three places in the state. This was revealed during the Third Meeting of State Advisory Board on Disability held here, Friday. The meeting revealed that Shradhalayas have been opened in Khurda, Puri, Ganjam, Kandhamal, Sambalpur, Bhadrak, Sundargarh and Cuttack districts. The scheme would be operational in Nabarangpur and Malkangiri soon. Likewise, it was also revealed that Manodaya has been functioning in Bhubaneswar, Ganjam and Jajpur districts. Presiding over the meeting, Social Security and Empowerment of PwDs (SSEPD) Minister Ashok Chandra Panda said, "Strengthening of special schools for PwD students and encouraging skill training for



meaningful employment have become the priorities of department." Expansion of the horizons of the rights and entitlements of PwDs, assuring their dignity and socio-economic participation in order to bring them into the mainstream is being emphasised, he added. It was stated that Integrated Infrastructure Complexes (Shradhalayas) have become operational in eight districts while Manodaya (State Institute for Disability Rehabilitation) is functional at three places in the state. The meeting also revealed that about 36 lakh beneficiaries have been included in Madhu Babu Pension Yojana (MBPY). Around 3,000 PwDs have been imparted skill development training while about 25,000 students are receiving Banishree Scholarship. Similarly 104 special schools are being given grant-in-aid from the government. Bhubaneswar-Central MLA Ananta Narayan Jena emphasised on convergence of various government departments for successful implementation of schemes aimed at development of PwDs. SSEPD principal secretary Bishnupada Sethi, in his introductory address, said that the advisory board provides platform involving all stakeholders

to work out collectively to find ways to overcome the challenges and ensure effective implementation of various schemes and programmes for the differently-abled. The board, constituted with MLAs, representatives of various departments and organisations working for the causes of PwDs deliberated on different issues relating to the welfare and development of PwDs. Matters discussed in the meeting include identification of employees with disabilities working in government and state PSUs, revision of conveyance allowance for employees with disabilities, inclusive education for children with disabilities, incentivising health insurance companies to formulate insurance schemes for PwDs and coverage of PwDs under BSKY, sign language training for employees at police stations and hospitals, availability of universally accessible education material in braille and sign language, subsidised loans for entrepreneurs with disability, accessible audit of all public buildings among others.

# 1st 'artificial reef' in state to fight climate change

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** In a first of its kind in the state, Dinabandhu Sahoo, a marine scientist and senior professor at Delhi University, and Sanjukta Sahoo, a civil engineering faculty at KIIT, have deployed a number of 'artificial reefs' in the coastal waters of Odisha after several months of experimentation. Increasing level of Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is causing the climate change, the effects of which are visible all around the world in the form of rising temperature, frequent cyclonic storms in coastal areas, acidification of ocean, loss of biodiversity, decreased fisheries productivity and rapid degradation of ecosystems. To address some of these challenges, the scientist duo has developed artificial reefs that can be implemented at grassroots level in coastal villages of Odisha. "Artificial Reefs will not only increase fisheries productivity, but also help in restoration of degraded marine ecosystem and will increase biodiversity," said Dinabandhu, who served as the



vice chancellor of FM University. Artificial Reefs construction and deployment is a multi-billion dollar industry and countries like USA, France, Japan, China, Korea and Australia have deployed millions of such reefs in their sea coasts to boost their economy. Around the world, approximately 5,00,000 Reef Balls have been deployed in 3,400 artificial reef and beach restoration projects in more than 70 countries. "Odisha has about 480km of coastline and stands as a potential site to explore the viability. Artificial reefs with specific design and materials will not only provide habitat to several marine species, it will also reduce the wave action protecting the coast against cyclonic storms," he said.

# RUINS OF ANCIENT BUDDHIST SITE DISCOVERED IN CUTTACK

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** Remnants of a Buddhist site dating back to the 9th century CE were discovered near Ganeswarpur village of Cuttack district by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) team recently. The site, scattered with Buddhist archaeological remains, was found near a small mound inside a rice field at far end of the village. A five-member team from INTACH's Odisha chapter visited the site located just 150 metres away from the Birupa

embankment to conduct a preliminary survey and document the archaeological remains. According to Deepak Kumar Nayak, co-convenor of INTACH's Cuttack Chapter, the present and ancient floodplains of the Birupa River are dotted with numerous Buddhist sites on both banks. The discovery of a large headless Abalokiteswar image, nearly six feet in height, on the ground near a small grassy mound is of historic significance, he said. "Although the head is missing, the iconography closely matches the Abalokiteswar images found at the nearby



Buddhist sites of Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, and Lalitgiri," Nayak said. The excavated Buddhist stupa in the nearby Rameswar village is situated across the river, where the images are now

being worshipped by the villagers as Hanumaneswara Mahadev. INTACH team member Biswajit Mohanty speculated about the existence of a Buddhist stupa, which had these large images and was buried under the silt due to frequent flooding of the Birupa River. The disfigured images lying at the site and a small shrine are also indicative of destruction by invaders during the Afghan-Mughal period, he added. Mohanty said that two temples in the village, such as Panchapandav Temple and Tareswara Temple, were de-

molished during Kalapahada's invasion in the 16th century CE. "The remains of the base of a temple and many odd-shaped kiln-baked bricks suggest that either a temple or a stupa is buried in the mound," Mohanty said. The INTACH team has also discovered a large number of broken potsherds, which include both red and blackware. The INTACH Cuttack chapter has sought help of the ASI, the State Archaeology Department, and the Culture Directorate of the Odisha government to dispatch experts to the spot for further detailed surveys of the ancient site.

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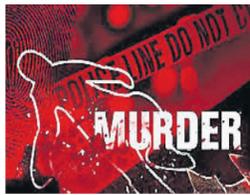
# Youth stabbed to death

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Rourkela, Feb 16:** A youth was brutally stabbed to death late Friday evening here over a business deal. The accused later surrendered before police.

According to sources, one Nihar Acharya, a resident of Bartoli near NIT Rourkela, was murdered at around 9.30pm, Friday near Sector-20 market. The accused identified as Kewal Singh surrendered before Sector-19 police after committing the crime.

Kewal and Nihar had some business agreement. They were doing land dealings and had issues over payment for over a month. Witnesses said there was a heated argument over payment Friday. Reportedly when Nihar assaulted Kewal, an enraged Kewal immediately brought out a sharp-edged weapon from his pocket and attacked Nihar. He repeatedly stabbed Nihar on his



abdomen, chest, thigh, and back. The assault was so brutal and vicious that the deceased collapsed there. Soon Kewal escaped the scene anticipating public outrage. Later, he went and surrendered before Sector-19 police with the murder weapon.

Meanwhile, locals and friends of Nihar immediately admitted him to Ispat General Hospital (IGH). Doctors there declared him dead.

Soon Sector-19 police informed Jhirpani police as the crime took place under the latter's jurisdiction. Police are tight-lipped about the crime.

# Tusker tramples man to death

PNN & AGENCIES

**Baripada, Feb 16:** A 45-year-old man was trampled to death by a tusker at a village in Mayurbhanj district, police said Friday. The incident happened at Kalianala village Thursday night, a police officer said.

The tusker trampled Puina Dehuri to death while he was sleeping in his house, the police officer said, adding that Puina's two daughters escaped unhurt.

A herd of three wild elephants from Dalma Sanctuary of Jharkhand had crossed over to the Betnoti Range of Baripada forest division Thursday, a Forest official said.

The police have registered a case of unnatural death and sent the body to PRM Medical College and Hospital in Baripada for autopsy, the officer-in-charge of Moroda police station, Satyanarayan Bal, said.



**MATTER OF FAITH:** Devotees carrying the idol of Lord Chandrashekhar, the representative deity of Lord Sakaleswar on a boat to Gupteshwar Shiva shrine in Chilika lake under Khallikote block in Ganjam district as part of Hara-Hara Bhet Jatra on the occasion of Tila Saptami festival, Friday

# Rajgangpur guarantees another close battle

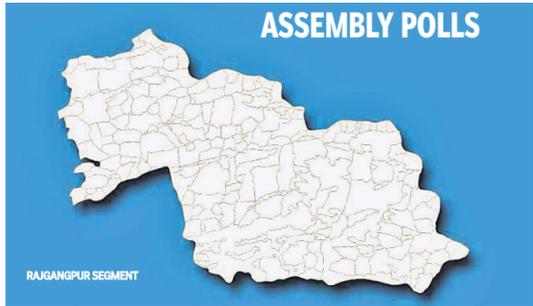
RAJESH MOHANTY, OP

**Rourkela, Feb 16:** Cement City Rajgangpur is one of the major Assembly segments of the state and this time, unlike 2019 elections, the political atmosphere has already become surcharged with aspiring candidates trying their level best to get party nominations.

Scenario of the contest has not changed much as the three major parties -- BJD, BJP and Congress -- are going to be in a triangular contest.

The position is slightly dicey for the BJD and the BJP because their list of ticket aspirants will get longer as the poll date approaches. However, the Congress is confident with the party having its sitting MLA Rajan Ekka at the helm.

In the 2019 Assembly elections, Congress' Ekka had won the seat with 53,913 votes with a brief margin of just 946 votes as BJD's Mangala Kissan pooled 52,972 votes. BJP's Narasingha Minz had garnered 52,896 votes, just 76 votes short of what BJD managed to grab. Like the previous polls, all the three parties are well aware that



Rajgangpur seat will again see a very close battle.

For the BJD, it is a prestige issue this election year. The party will have to fight dissension and factionalism. Mangala, who is again the front runner for party ticket, will be 76 this year. He has a strong base among the 'kissans' who have a strong presence in Rajgangpur constituency. However, many in the party say that he doesn't have his age and health with him this time and the advantage for Mangala is that he has not promoted anyone from his family.

Meanwhile, Benedict Tirkey (50) seems to be the next best

choice for the party. Along with age, he has a strong appeal amongst the tribals of his community. Besides, the urban Rajgangpur also likes him. He had lost once earlier by a very close margin. A strong and staunch supporter of Minister Sarada Nayak, he was the party secretary and also president of the Adivasi Morcha. And the 'no love' relation between Sarada and Mangala is not a national secret. When Mangala failed to win last time, his followers had openly blamed it on Sarada. Besides, Mangala's proximity with local heavyweight Dilip Ray has not gone down well with

party cadres here. Meanwhile, there was a buzz last year that Ekka may shift his loyalty from Congress and join the BJD. This made Mangala and Benedict nervous and if this happens, BJD will get a winning candidate, at least on paper, because of his performance last time.

In addition to this, given the ruling party's penchant for female candidates, it may also spring one surprise out of the blue. Though no name has surfaced so far, Madhuri Lugun, the chairman of Rajgangpur Municipality, could have a ticket if the party plans to play the woman card. Given the scenario, Rajgangpur may prove tough for BJD as a little miscalculation will cost the party dearly.

Meanwhile, BJP is going to throw in all its might to wrest this seat from Congress and at the same time deny BJD of a possible victory. The saffron party, which was a close third in the 2019 elections, has reasons to sound confident given the voting pattern and number of votes the party pooled in the previous polls and the present religious fervour in people's mind.

"The difference is not very big for us. This time we are confident that Rajgangpur will be ours," said BJP state spokesperson Dhiren Senapaty.

Even today, saffron is the dominant colour in the skyline of Rajgangpur. The flags of Lord Ram, hoisted January 22, are yet to be brought down. The city has a very strong trader base dominated by Marwaris along with Odias. In addition, the city has past records of severe communal tension.

The party is confident about the sizeable Hindu and small Sikh, Jain and other voters. However, infighting may prove detrimental for BJP because of the sheer numbers of the aspirants. Apart from 2019 candidate Minz, there are a couple of others interested in the party ticket. Another name in the front is Upendra Pradhan. He was given a party ticket on two occasions and he lost. However, he is quite active at constituency level nowadays. Apart from these two, Mahendra Majhi, a long time cadre of the party, and Santosh Tirkey, who is an Oram and has age to his favour, are in the race for the saffron ticket.

# 2 minor girls drown in Balimela reservoir



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Malkangiri/Chittrakonda, Feb 16:** In a tragic incident, two minor girls from Kenduguda village under Nakamamudi panchayat and Korukonda block in Malkangiri district drowned in the Balimela reservoir Thursday.

The bodies of the deceased girls, identified as Sabitri Muduli, 7, daughter of Saniya Muduli and Dabili Kadangia, 7, daughter of Dhanu Kadangia of Kenduguda village, were recovered Friday.

According to reports, the deceased duo along with two other minor girls of the village had gone to the Balimela reservoir to take a bath Thursday afternoon. While bathing, Sabitri and Dabili

went missing in the deep water. The villagers then launched a search operation in the reservoir but could not trace the missing girls. The family members of the missing girls then informed the police and Fire brigade at Chittrakonda.

Chittrakonda police along with the Fire personnel reached the spot Friday morning and after launching a search operation along with the villagers, the bodies of the two missing girls were fished out of the reservoir and sent for post-mortem. Police registered a case of unnatural death and handed over the bodies of the deceased girls to their family members. A pall of gloom prevailed on the locality after the tragedy occurred.

# NHRC issues summons to DM over death of transgender in Srimandir

PNN & AGENCIES

**Kendrapara, Feb 16:** The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a summons to the Puri District Magistrate (DM) to appear before it March 18 in connection with the death of a transgender inside Srimandir.

The District Collector was asked to appear before the commission along with the requisite additional report relating to the death of a 36-year-old transgender who fell from 30-foot high 'Gumuta' of the shrine May 1, 2022.

The commission in its direction February 12 said if the requisite reports are received on or before March 11 then the personal appearance of the Collector will be dispensed with.

The order was issued acting on a petition filed by human rights defender Radhakanta Tripathy.

Tripathy in his petition stated that transgender Balaram Rout of Nimapara, deprived of many social welfare schemes of the State,



jumped from the 'Gumuta' of the famous Puri shrine May 1, 2022.

He alleged that the fatal incident happened due to the failure and negligence of police and inaction on the part of the Social Justice department and temple administration which amounts to a serious violation of human rights. The commission observed that the matter is pending for want of additional report in light of the comment of the complainant wherein he made a submission that the deceased could not ensure social welfare schemes of the State and the next kin of the deceased has not received any compensation/ex-gratia/rehabilitation.

A request was further made to seek a compliance report on preventive, punitive, welfare, and compensatory measures for

transgenders living in the state in the interest of justice and human rights. A reminder was issued to Puri District Magistrate August 25, 2023 for the filing of additional report in light of the complainant's comments.

But no additional report was sent forcing the commission to issue a final reminder to the DM for submission of the requisite report within four weeks failing which the commission would be constrained to invoke its coercive power u/s 13 of the PHR Act, 1993 calling for the personal appearance of the authority concerned before the commission.

The commission observed that despite the direction/reminders, the Puri DM failed to submit any report even to date.

Taking a serious view of the same, the commission directed its registry to issue a summons to Puri DM u/s 13 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 for appearance before the commission March 18 next along with requisite additional report on the matter.

# Woman kills husband with mom, paramour

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** A man was killed by his mother-in-law, wife and her paramour in Komanda village in Nayagarh district, and the accused have been arrested, police said Friday.

The body of the deceased identified as Prakash Nayak was exhumed from a room in his in-laws' house Thursday evening. Prakash, who had married Jyotsna around 14 years back, used to stay at his in-laws' house in Komanda village.

Recently, Jyotsna developed an illicit relationship with a youth of the same village, which often led to argument between the couple. As Prakash's family did not meet him for long, they went to his in-laws' place to meet him.

Somehow Prakash's father sensed that his son has been killed and buried in the house after which he lodged a police complaint. After interrogation of the accused, Prakash's body was exhumed in the presence of police, scientific team and the executive magistrate, said Sudhakar Sahoo, Sub-Divisional Police Officer, Sarankula.

# BBMCH newborn lost and found in 12 hours

POST NEWS NETWORK



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bolangir, Feb 16:** A newborn boy allegedly went missing from the special newborn care unit (SNCU) of the Bhima Bhoi Medical College and Hospital (BBMCH) here Friday and was later found and brought back to the hospital after 12 hours.

As per reports, Sushil Swain of Budhipadar village under Kantamal block in Boudh district had admitted his wife Jhumki to the Obstetrics and Gynaecology department of the BBMCH, Thursday. She gave birth to a boy Friday morning. As the newborn was underweight, he was admitted to the SNCU.

However, later the family members came to know that the infant was missing. Along with a voluntary organisation from Bolangir; they staged a sit-in protest questioning the safety of infants in the hospital and alleging that the child has been stolen.

The worried family members then lodged a complaint at the police outpost at the BBMCH in this regard. However, after about 12 hours the Town police recovered the boy from another couple at Sahajapita village near Kachermal forest under Kantamal police limits in Boudh district and brought him back to BBMCH around 9pm Friday.

However, neither the hospital authorities nor the police revealed any details. As per sources, the Child Welfare Committee is investigating the matter. Tension was palpable on the hospital premises with people demanding to know if the child was swapped or the hospital authorities were covering the matter to hide their goof-up.

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
e-Tender Notice No. ETCECONIIBBS2024008, Dated: 07.02.2024

**NAME OF WORK:** CONSTRUCTION OF ROAD OVER BRIDGE OF SPAN 72M BOW STRING GIRDER WITH RCC DECK SLAB & LIMITED HEIGHT SUBWAY (LHS) AT RLY. KM. 309/7-9 IN LIEU OF L.C. NO. 125 BETWEEN KENDUAPADA (KED)-MANJURI ROAD (MZZ) STATIONS AND SOIL EXPLORATION OF PROPOSED ROB'S BETWEEN CUTTACK (CTC)-BHADRAK (BHC) ON HOWRAH-CHENNAI MAIN LINE OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

Approx. Cost of the Work: ₹ 2049.79 Lakh, EMD: ₹ 11,74,900/-, Completion Period of the Work: 18 (Eighteen) Months.

Tender Closing Date & Time: At 1200 Hrs. of 12.03.2024.

No manual offers sent by Post / Courier / Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website: <http://www.ireps.gov.in>

Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigenda issued for this tender. The tenderers/ bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate and must be registered on IREPS Portal. Only registered tenderer/bidder can participate on e-tendering.

The tenderers should read all instructions to the tenderers carefully and ensure compliance of all instructions including check lists, para 3.1 (additional check-list) of Tender form (Second sheet) Annexure-I of chapter 2 of Tender documents, submission of Annexure-B duly verified and signed by Chartered Accountant.

Chief Administrative Officer (Con)/ PR-126/CG/23-24 Bhubaneswar

# Science park, planetarium await completion

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Rourkela, Feb 16:** The under-construction Science Park and Planetarium at Kalinga Vihar of Chhend Colony has been marred by inordinate delays. The project has two components -- a natural science park and a planetarium -- and both have jumped the deadline over 20 months back.

It was just before the election in 2019 that Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik laid the foundation stone for the park being built on 7.49 acre land. The construction started in 2021 by Rourkela Municipal Corporation (RMC).

The science park is being built at a cost of ₹8 crore, while the

planetarium is coming up at a cost of ₹19.70 crore. The science park, which will have exhibits of natural sciences like Newton's laws of gravity and the atomic structure along with statues of animals and birds such as dinosaur, elephant, pelican depicting their habits and habitat. Apart from a few structures of the animals, there is a pathway that has come up at the construction site. But nothing has yet been mentioned about the animals, their hunting habits and habitats in the park.

Meanwhile, work on the boat-jogging lagoon has been completed. The pathway is being used by fitness enthusiasts for jogging and



morning walks. When the sun goes down, the park gets covered with darkness. Fortunately, it is yet to become a happy hunting ground for the anti-socials because it is surrounded on one side by a private management

institute and on the other by busy roads. The market complex situated in front of the park is not ready yet to run businesses.

"I am sure people will visit the complex, which will have mostly eateries even if the park

project is getting delayed. But the administration is not looking at this," said one of the shop owners.

Work on the planetarium began April 29, 2019 and was scheduled to be over by July 28, 2022. However, at this moment only the building stands and the entrance to the park awaits completion.

When this was brought to the notice of the Rourkela ADM Ashutosh Kulkarni, he said, "I will speak to the concerned department authorities and will find out the actual reasons for the delay. Once I get to know everything, I will take the necessary steps to complete it."

Nothing but a radical change of consciousness can save humanity from the terrible plight into which it is plunged

THE MOTHER



## The 'Paper' Wars

The white papers and the black papers on the economy have sent a lot of bureaucrats scurrying around for data. Everybody recognizes that these papers are almost political weaponizing of data figures. Still, at the moment, both former bureaucrats and current bureaucrats are locked in an almost death-like struggle to thread out new figures that can justify the policy measures that they had initiated during their terms in office.

Amid this struggle, there came an extremely erudite data stream from ex-Tamil Nadu finance minister and current DMK IT minister P. Thiaga Rajan, hailed by some as a financial statesman, who was able to show how the Dravidian model has outdone the Gujarat model and any national model, especially the current flavour, the Uttar Pradesh model, as far as economic growth and its benefits are concerned.

Rajan argues that the UP model is more a chimaera than a fact, even with the continuous net transfer of tax revenues from better-off states such as Tamil Nadu to less developed Uttar Pradesh. He showed data that at an accelerated growth rate that is 2 per cent higher than Tamil Nadu's every year, it would still take 64 years for Uttar Pradesh's per capita net SDP to catch up with Tamil Nadu's!

But for the babus at the Centre, the UP success story is a great narrative to run with as we head into the poll season. Why let reality interfere with a dream?

### Navigating Nexus

Serving and retired IAS officers, retired IPS and IFS officers, district judges and officials working in various departments are among the 370 people who have applied for the six posts of information commissioners in Karnataka.

The government issued a notification to fill six posts of information commissioners – five in Bengaluru and one in Belagavi – in November. Among the applicants are IAS officers Mamata BR and Richard Vincent D'Souza, and retired IAS, IPS, IFS officers AB Ibrahim, B Balagopal, Allappa R, M G Hiremath, Ashit Mohan Prasad, KT Balakrishna, M V Amaranath and Rajeev Ranjan. The list also has four district judges, over 30 retired officials who served in posts ranging from directors to joint secretary and first division assistants.

With a diverse pool of candidates, the process appears to be teeming with potential. However, beneath the surface lies a contentious issue that has plagued such appointments for years – the influence of political connections over meritocracy.

An activist who has revealed lapses in several departments through RTI said successive governments have ignored the basic principles during selection. Instances where individuals with dubious records or questionable integrity have been appointed to such positions undermine the very essence of transparency and erode public trust in institutions. The ramifications of such appointments are dire. How will Karnataka decide?

### Mohan Yadav signals change in Madhya Pradesh

The winds of change are sweeping through the administrative corridors of Madhya Pradesh as new Chief Minister Mohan Yadav is moving quickly to assemble his core team of officers. Yadav's proactive approach hints at a shift in the state's governance dynamics, and an attempt, undoubtedly in close consultation with the Centre, to leave the legacy of his predecessor Shivraj Singh Chouhan behind.

In recent weeks, we've witnessed a flurry of appointments and re-allocations, with senior babus, emblematic of Chouhan's tenure, gracefully stepping aside to make room for fresh faces and new perspectives.

Sandeep Yadav's appointment as Commissioner of Public Relations and Sameer Yadav's assignment as the head of the CM's security, underscore the new CM's intent to infuse vigour and competence into critical positions. Additionally, the elevation of Raghuvendra Singh to the role of Principal Secretary in the Chief Minister's Office reflects a strategic move to blend experience with innovation. Others in the new team include Bharat Tadav, Avinash Lavania, Chandrashekhar Walimbe, Aditi Garg and Anshul Gupta.

The Chief Minister's recent meeting with Director General of Police Sudhir Saxena signals an imminent reshuffle of IPS officers as well, sources have told DKB. With change comes opportunity, and Yadav's administration appears determined to capitalize on it.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect

### WISDOM CORNER

- Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever. **MAHATMA GANDHI**
- The ballot is stronger than the bullet. **ABRAHAM LINCOLN**
- If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart. **NELSON MANDELA**

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1864:** During the American Civil War, the Confederate Hunley became the first submarine to sink an enemy ship when it successfully attacked the USS Housatonic in the waters off Charleston, South Carolina.
- 1955:** British Minister of Defense Harold Macmillan announced plans to develop and produce hydrogen bombs.
- 1979:** After the Vietnam War, Vietnam bolstered its ties with the Soviet Union rather than with China, and, following a series of anti-Chinese, pro-Soviet maneuvers by Vietnam, China invaded its southern neighbour this day.
- 2008:** Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia, though a number of countries refused to recognize the new republic; the International Court of Justice later ruled that Kosovo had not violated international law, but Serbia rejected that decision.

### LOL

#### Practical joke

The soldier serving in Hong Kong was annoyed and upset when his girl wrote breaking off their engagement and asking for her photograph back. He went out and collected from his friends all the unwanted photographs of women

that he could find, bundled them all together and sent them back with a note saying, "I regret to inform you that I cannot remember which one is you -- please keep your photo and return the others."



Shivaji Sarkar

**DELHI BELONGS TO ALL COUNTRYMEN. THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD INVITE THE FARMERS WITH OPEN ARMS AND NOT WITH SPIKED ROADS**

# GOVT MUST LISTEN

## FOCUS FARMERS' PROTEST

Farmers are protesting in an election year all over the world. The day the Indian farmers were made to face severe assault on February 13 and the roads to Delhi were blocked with concrete walls, barbed wire and spikes; farmers in Brussels clogged streets, with 1300 tractors, leading to Paris pressing for fairer deals almost akin to their Indian brethren. They did not face any hostility anywhere, though agriculture according to Bloomberg, has become a key battleground in a wider culture war over money, food and climate change.

The list of "grievances long - soaring costs, increasing bureaucracy, new European Union regulations in its Green Deal and imports diluting their markets". A placard says: "He who sows misery reaps anger". What an irony! These farmers are agitating as the European Union goes to the polls. The government listens to them without accusing them of politicking.

Indian farmers in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh travelling to Delhi on tractors with supplies for a long sit-in, have demands that are similar to the French farmers. Their placard says, India must quit WTO along with their demands for a guaranteed minimum support price (MSP), implying that the market must ensure fair prices, food, and sustainable farming. While Indian farmers are labelled as being "supported by Pakistan, Khalistanis, and other anti-country forces", the farmers in Paris are patiently heard by their government, and they put off protests.

The contrast is sharp. The government of Haryana blocked their roads at Punjab border; fired tear gas shells, lobbed shells from drones. They are alleged to be provoked by the opposition parties, AAP and



**While Indian farmers are labelled as being 'supported by Pakistan, Khalistanis, and other anti-country forces', the farmers in Paris are patiently heard by their government, and they put off protests**

Congress in particular.

Among the 70 countries going to polls, is the EU, India and the US. In France, the farmers complain that politicians only want to get elected, so they are latching onto the farmers' movement. Most politicians and parties keep off them. Even Congress's Black Paper on the Economy only cursorily mentions them.

The Manmohanomics of the Congress party is responsible for the beginning of corporatisation of farming, an aim of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Their successor government has been following the Manmohanomics and only aggravated the issues of marketing.

During the past few years, many long marches have been held by farmers even during UPA government, as also long dharnas during the NDA, as along Delhi borders with Haryana and UP in 2022. The similarities are stark. In Europe, farmers have been holding protests in Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Romania. Polish farmers have vociferously opposed food grain arriving from neighbouring Ukraine and forced the government to negotiate.

Indian farmers, so far, did not even protest petrol and diesel prices that are almost double that of international crude prices. They even did not protest against auto-lobby-NGT sponsored illegal seizures of their ten-year-old cars and tractors, for which they paid EMIs for seven years. They suffered takeover of their land for building of roads for irrationally high tolls. Climate issues for grain, horticulture or fish farmers are wrecking them.

Climate change is a big issue for European and US farmers. Though the governments there may not be that intent on the issues, they are not hostile. A US retired diplomat Hegadorn is quoted as saying, "You can live without an electric car, you can live without a mobile phone, but you're not going to live without farmers and the food they produce". Sensible approach in a country that has only a minuscule percentage left as farmers. Corporatisation of agriculture has neither helped the farming community in Europe nor in the US.

In contrast, India has over 54 per cent left in agriculture or over 75 crore people. Since the last farmers' agitation two years

ago and the withdrawal of three supposedly anti-farmer laws, the government has continued with the Manmohanomics and heaped miseries on the farmers. It should not be obsessed with the factor that they are agitating during election time. The world over it is so.

The farmers are being neglected and overlooked in policy framing from the richest US and European countries to the poorest India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In all these countries while corporate profits swell, farmers wages remain stagnant for decades. Their input costs on seed, fertilisers, machines or pesticides multiplied everywhere.

Economic Survey of 2016 says farmers income was Rs 1700 a month. This as per National Statistical Office was Rs 10218 a year or about Rs 2000 a month as per Rajya Sabha statement in December 2022. Market-linking of agriculture or corporatisation in the prevailing circumstances has failed in the affluent countries. In the US, farmers complain they are being priced out by big companies.

Those advising in India that it could be a success are apparently misleading policy planners. More sensitivity is required. Farmers the world over are agitating not because there are elections, they want patient hearing for solving the global crisis.

Delhi belongs to all countrymen. The government should invite the farmers with open arms and not with spiked roads. If attended, it is easy to solve as promising guaranteed MSP would not burden the exchequer with more than Rs 2.5 lakh crore (trillion) of additional expenses, which the government agencies recover as they sell the food grains. Listening in any regime is an asset.

INFA

### SPECTRUM PAKISTAN

# Middle-class rage against military rule

Pakistan's general election February 8, marred by allegations of widespread voting irregularities, resulted in a hung parliament and the formation of a coalition government consisting of the country's two major dynastic parties. Nevertheless, the outcome represents a stunning defeat for the country's powerful military, as candidates backed by the imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf Party (PTI) secured more parliamentary seats than any other political bloc.

Although PTI did not win enough seats to form a government on its own, its unexpectedly strong performance underscores Khan's popular appeal. In the run-up to the vote, PTI members and supporters have faced imprisonment, harassment, and the destruction of their businesses. On Election Day itself, cellular services were disabled in a last-ditch effort to disrupt turnout efforts. But despite these obstacles, Pakistani voters delivered a historic blow to the military.

More than a competition between political parties, the Pakistani election represented a confrontation between those who oppose the military's increasingly blatant political meddling and those who collaborate with it to gain personal and professional benefits. But the out-

come raises an important question: Why has the regime encountered such widespread opposition now, particularly in regions long considered bastions of military support?

To be sure, PTI's strong showing can be partly attributed to Khan's popular appeal as Pakistan's greatest-ever cricketer and his decision to challenge the military's authority. This defiance led to his arrest and subsequent conviction on corruption charges, for which he is serving a ten-year prison sentence. But it also represents widespread anger among the country's middle class, whose economic and political clout has steadily declined.

According to economist Durr-e-Nayab, roughly 40% of Pakistan's population could be classified as middle class – a group that has accounted for most of the country's income growth over the past few decades, spreading from urban centers to rural areas, where demand for middle-class goods like motorcycles and TVs has surged. At the same time, the number of private schools has increased dramatically, from 3,000 in 1982 to 70,000 in 2015. More than 34% of school-age Pakistani children currently attend these schools, including many from lower-middle-income households.

Pakistan has also experienced a higher-education boom over

the past two decades, with universities sprouting even in remote areas, facilitated by the support of the country's Higher Education Commission. While the quality of the education offered by these institutions is questionable, the surge in enrollment has given rise to what can be described as an "aspirational" middle class. Despite their lack of stable incomes, these households share the same dreams and ambitions as their middle-class counterparts.

However, the section is grappling not only with diminishing economic prospects but also with political repression. Once dismissed as a "chattering class" who preferred watching soap operas at home instead of voting, middle-class Pakistanis have become more politically engaged and now form the backbone of PTI's base. As the military intensified its crackdown on Khan's middle-class supporters – many of whom are women – the opposition has become more determined, largely owing to the enthusiasm of Pakistan's tech-savvy youth.

Moreover, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for mobilizing voters. Following a controversial Supreme Court decision that prohibited Khan's party from using its traditional cricket-bat symbol, supporters flocked to social media to disseminate information about the new symbols assigned to PTI-

backed candidates.

In a country where rural politics has historically revolved around kinship networks and patronage systems, social media has made it possible for national issues to take precedence over parochial concerns. The long-standing notion that rural vote brokers could secure the support of entire clans is becoming obsolete. This shift severely impedes the military's ability to control politics through local notables.

But while the results offer a glimmer of hope, Pakistan's post-election landscape is marked by a volatile combination of diminishing resources, a growing number of stakeholders, and an authoritarian elite unwilling to make any concessions. In the absence of institutional channels to resolve political disputes, conflicts are bound to be settled through violence.

Therefore, it's time Pakistan's foreign partners used their influence to prevent further instability. Those who control the purse should press the military to loosen its economic and political grip on the country.

*The writer is Associate Professor of Development Economics and Globe Fellow in the economics of Muslim Societies at the University of Oxford.*  
PROJECT SYNDICATE

## Letters

### TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: [edit@orissapost.com](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

**OrissaPOST**  
B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

### Monumental feat

Sir, Legendary off spinner from Tamil Nadu Ravichandran Ashwin is in the record books with a bag of 500 wickets in Test match cricket. He did a lot of hard work and reached a stage as a striking force. Generally, spinners mature with age and Ashwin displayed his variety in bowling to a great measure and foxed the English batsmen in trouble straightaway. All along he was relegated to warm up benches and never allowed in the playing XI for the wrong reasons. Despite a lion hearted show with both the bat and ball he received inadequate recognition for his manifold achievements. Ashwin's mesmerising spells with the ball have at times camouflaged his superb work with the bat as well. It is a tribute to Ashwin's skill and application to various aspects of the game that he has lasted so long despite tough competition.

CK Subramaniam, NAVI MUMBAI

### SC's welcome move

Sir, The Supreme Court ruling the electoral bond scheme as 'unconstitutional' is most welcome, and the verdict is a slap on the face of the ruling BJP, as the scheme was introduced by the Narendra Modi government in 2018, which is a turbid affair. Political funding only helps big corporates, and it tends to placate political patrons through 'donations'. In turn, such donations become a cause for fudging books. To run their organisations and to conduct elections, political parties, especially the BJP, accept huge funds from these corporates, which allows for an inappropriate nexus between the two to emerge and grow. Electoral bonds contravene a citizen's fundamental right to know. Such an unreasonable and irrational restriction on information at the cost of larger public interest goes against the very spirit of our democracy and the rules of the law.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

### Hard work paid off

Sir, In recent history, rarely has any player's international debut made as much noise as Sarfaraz Khan's. And there was every reason for it to happen. The boy has been one of the most consistent performers in Indian domestic cricket over the past few years. However, the BCCI selectors took their time to rope him into the Indian cricket team. Sarfaraz repaid their faith with a confident innings, a 48-ball half-century that is the fastest by an Indian in the post-independence era.

Jahangir Shaikh, MUMBAI



## High fluoride found in Delhi's groundwater GREEN COVER FOR WAZIRPUR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** Groundwater samples collected from 58 tubewells in Delhi exceed permissible fluoride limits, according to a report submitted by the Delhi government to the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

The report said that the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) collected groundwater samples from 1,256 tubewells across the national capital following directions from the NGT.

Union Minister of State for Jal Shakti, Bishweswar Tudu, informed the Rajya Sabha December 4 last year that arsenic had been detected in groundwater in parts of 230 districts in 25 states, and fluoride in 469 districts in 27 states.

Observing that the Central



Ground Water Authority (CGWA) acknowledged the presence of high concentrations of arsenic and fluoride in groundwater; but no effective measures have been taken, the NGT issued notices to 28 states, Union territories, CGWA, and the environment ministry in December.

According to the response filed by the Delhi government, groundwater samples were collected from 56 tubewells in Narela and Bawana in northwest Delhi, of which 33 exceeded permissible fluoride limits.

Groundwater samples from 11 out of the 70 tubewells tested

Fluoride concentration was also found to be high in samples collected from four tubewells in North Delhi and Northeast Delhi, five tubewells in West Delhi, and four in Southwest Delhi

in Najafgarh Zone and Nangloi contained higher-than-permitted fluoride levels.

Fluoride concentration was also found to be high in samples collected from four tubewells in North Delhi and Northeast Delhi, five tubewells in West Delhi, and four in Southwest Delhi.

None of the samples collected

from Central Delhi and South Delhi had fluoride content beyond permissible limits.

The Delhi government informed the tribunal that the DJB has taken precautions and issued directions to its maintenance divisions to either stop the supply from such tubewells or utilise the water for purposes other than drinking.

The city government has also requested additional time from the NGT to assess arsenic concentration in the samples collected from tubewells in the capital. Fluoride found in groundwater occurs naturally due to the breakdown of rocks and soils, weathering, and deposition of atmospheric particles. Most fluorides are sparingly soluble and present in groundwater in small amounts.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** The Municipal Corporation of Delhi has developed a 1.75 acre green cover in northwest Delhi's Wazirpur locality, a heavily industrialised region and among the top pollution hotspots in the capital, to mitigate the impact of the local sources of air pollution in the area.

The civic body planted a total of 16,000 saplings of indigenous varieties on a vacant land that had turned into a garbage dumping point to develop a mini forest in the region using the Miyawaki technique, an official aware of the development told PTI.

"The Horticulture department of the MCD in collaboration with an NGO converted the vacant land used for garbage dumping to create a mini forest in the area that will help in improving the air quality levels in the region. We have utilised 1 acre of land for plantation and the rest of the land is used to develop pedestrian crossing, install swings, and benches," he said in a statement.

Wazirpur is among the 13 identified pollution hotspots in the

national capital that contribute to the higher pollution levels in the city in comparison to other states.

Delhi-NCR recorded the longest spell of 'very poor' or 'worse' air quality including maximum number of smog episodes between November and December in 2023 when compared to the last six years, according to a report by the Centre for Science and Environment.

To mitigate the effect of air pollutants on the residents in such areas, the MCD is working on increasing the green cover in the city and develop parks and vacant lands into mini forests. The civic body also plans to create a green fence around the periphery of Bhalswa landfill site, one of the three garbage dumping points in Delhi, by clearing five to 10 metres of land and plant around 50 native species of plants. Species such as pipal, babul, pilkhan, banyan, jamun, neem, among others will be used for plantation at the landfill site. The Miyawaki method of forestation helps in creating green belts in urban areas in a shorter span of time as compared to the time consumed to conventional forests.

## NABARD report puts Guj's credit potential at ₹3.53L- Cr for '24-25

NABARD IS AN APEX REGULATORY BODY FOR OVERALL REGULATION OF REGIONAL RURAL BANKS AND APEX COOPERATIVE BANKS IN INDIA



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Gandhinagar, Feb 15:** A National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) report Thursday revealed that Gujarat's credit potential for priority sectors stands at ₹3.53 lakh crore.

A NABARD release said its annual document 'State Focus Paper 2024-25' was unveiled by Gujarat Chief Secretary Raj Kumar at an event held here in the presence of senior officials, bankers, heads of NGOs and stakeholders.

NABARD is an apex regulatory body for overall regulation of regional rural banks and apex cooperative banks in India.

"NABARD's meticulous analysis highlighted a credit potential of ₹3.53 lakh crore for Gujarat, including ₹1.42 lakh crore, which comes to 40 per cent, for agriculture and allied sectors, ₹1.80 lakh crore (51 per cent) for the MSME sector, and the remaining 9 per cent for other priority sectors," said the release.

The document not only outlines the existing credit-absorption capacity but also proposes strategies to enhance it

through strategic partnerships and policy interventions, the NABARD release added.

Speaking on the occasion, Kumar exhorted bankers to view farmers as small business enterprises and to augment credit supply to the state's farmers by reposing greater faith in their enterprising skills.

He reiterated the state government's support to NABARD and also called for greater convergence of the bank's developmental interventions with the government's schemes for capacity building of farmers to augment their market scope not just in India but also abroad, the release said.

AK Rakesh, Additional Chief Secretary, state Agriculture, Farmers Welfare and Co-Operation department, urged bankers to strive towards achieving this credit potential of ₹3.53 lakh crore for financial year 2024-25.

While calling for greater convergence between NABARD, state government and bankers, NABARD Chief General Manager (Gujarat RO) BK Singhal asked bankers to focus on agricultural credit disparities and address them.

## Residents allege inaction on multiple safety complaints

ALIPUR BLAZE

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Friday announced an ex-gratia of ₹10 lakh each for the kin of those killed in the paint factory fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** Several complaints were made to authorities about fire safety in Dayalpur market area in Alipur here but no one paid any attention, relatives of victims of the explosion and fire incident and some residents alleged Friday.

Devendra Saini, a nurse at the drug rehabilitation centre, said the work at the paint factory, where fire broke out, mostly involves use of inflammable substances and multiple complaints were submitted by them.

"By the time police reached the spot, damage was already done. We made several complaints earlier regarding our concerns but nothing happened. This is a place where fire catches easier than petrol. Government always engages in blame game, how can we expect help from them?" he asked. "Paint work includes mostly inflammable substances and that factory was situated so close to us. We raised concerns but nobody paid attention," Saini alleged.

He further said that when the blast took place, the entire area was engulfed by fire instantly. "We could not do anything about



The death toll in the explosion and subsequent fire in the paint factory rose to 11 with four more bodies recovered from the premises

Police said four persons injured in the fire that broke out Thursday evening are in hospital

it," he said. The death toll in the explosion and subsequent fire in the paint factory rose to 11 with four more bodies recovered from the premises.

Police said four persons injured in the fire that broke out Thursday evening are in hospital. The fire was preceded by a blast and soon it spread to nearby buildings, including the drug rehabilitation centre and eight shops. One of the victims' family members Malti said the bodies were charred beyond recognition.

"My husband's brother was there at the factory when it caught fire. We couldn't even recognise the bodies. They were charred beyond recognition," she said.

Another family member of a victim said they have not been informed by the police whether their kin has survived or not

and they have no information about where the deceased and the injured were taken.

"My nephew is one of the victims. Police didn't even tell us where the injured and deceased have been taken. We asked if he is dead or alive but the police did not even tell us that," Ekta (55) told PTI.

A fire official said a call about the blaze was received around 5:30 pm Thursday and 22 fire tenders were pressed into service. The fire was brought under control by 9 pm, he said.

A resident said, "All the locals have given their places on rent to the factory owners. How can we complain about them? This is also an issue for us since our relatives and acquaintances have their properties here. We want to get rid of such illegally running factories but not at the cost of our relationships."

## Guj govt plans to develop open jungle safari in Barda sanctuary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Gandhinagar, Feb 16:** An open jungle safari will be developed at Barda Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat's Porbandar district, state tourism minister Mulu Bera said Friday.

He was replying to a question in the Assembly from Congress leader Arjun Modhwadia regarding development of tourism in Porbandar.

"The state government plans to develop an open jungle safari at Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, which at present has four to five lions. More lions will be introduced. Several other animals, including sambar, are present there," Bera said.

A proposal to develop 'Gandhi corridor' in Porbandar, the birthplace of the Father of the Nation, has also been sought from the collector, while tenders have been issued to develop Mokarsagar lake there as an iconic tourist spot, he informed the House.

As per a document titled 'Project Lion @47 vision for Amrutkal,' Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, located near the coastal city of Porbandar and 100 kilometres from the Gir National Park, was identified as a potential second home for Asiatic lions.



According to a report released by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in 2020, the number of Asiatic lions in Gir forests has gone up from 523 in 2015 to 674 in 2020

Efforts have been underway since the 1990s to find a relocation site for the big cats within Gujarat.

The Barda-Alech hills and coastal forests have the potential to accommodate a population of 40 adult and sub-adult lions, as per the document.

According to a report released by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in 2020, the number of Asiatic lions

## Caravanning in Saputara, Shivrajpur beach soon

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Gandhinagar, Feb 16:** Gujarat's tourism landscape is gearing up for a transformation with the introduction of caravan tourism. The Gujarat Tourism Department has earmarked three picturesque destinations -- Saputara, Shivrajpur Beach in Devbhoomi Dwarka, and Rudrani Dam in Kutch -- as prime locations to initiate this novel trend.

The caravan tourism model promises sightseeing, comfortable travel, privacy, and home-cooked meals, offering travellers an experience. Caravans designed to accommodate six, eight, ten, or 12 passengers will be available, with each caravan park providing parking for up to 10 such vehicles. Each caravan vehicle will have essential amenities such as a kitchen, toilet, bathroom, television, music, and internet, ensuring a seamless and enjoyable journey for tourists.

Saputara is known for its tribal culture, it is showcased through traditional dance performances, handicrafts, and festivals. Adventure enthusiasts flock to Saputara for trekking, boating, and paragliding activities. At the same time, nature lovers revel in its diverse flora and fauna, including the picturesque

Saputara Lake and the majestic Gira Falls.

Shivrajpur Beach, situated in Devbhoomi Dwarka district, is known for its beauty and serene ambiance. The beach is celebrated for its golden sands, crystal-clear waters, and panoramic views of the Arabian Sea.

There are plans to establish a ₹4-crore caravan park in Saputara, Gujarat's sole hill station, while proposals for caravan tourism at Shivrajpur Beach and Rudrani Dam are in the pipeline.

## POLLUTION IMPACT IN DELHI Spike in respiratory diseases: Docs

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** Even as the national Capital's air quality continues to dip, doctors Thursday reported a rise in respiratory and cardiac issues.

As per data by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi's overall Air Quality Index (AQI) showed no sign of improvement as it was recorded at 294 Thursday at 9 am. The AQI was 341 Wednesday and 342 a day earlier.

"We have noticed a significant increase in the number of patients seeking medical attention for various health issues, ranging from respiratory problems to cardiac conditions. Many

individuals are experiencing worsened symptoms of respiratory ailments such as asthma, persistent cough, colds, and viral infections, including cases of H1N1," Dr Sushila Kataria, Senior Director, Internal Medicine, Medanta, Gurugram, told IANS.

"The primary contributing factor to these health issues is the presence of smog, which directly irritates the lungs and throat, particularly affecting those with pre-existing respiratory conditions," she explained.

Of the 254 cities, Delhi's pollution levels were recorded at the highest with the average PM2.5 concentration at 206 micrograms per cubic metre.

भारत सरकार / Government of India  
वित्त मंत्रालय / Ministry of Finance  
राजस्व विभाग / Department of Revenue

Applications are invited for posts of **Judicial Members (63 posts) and Technical Members (Centre) (32 posts) and Technical Members (State) (1 post)** in the Principal Bench and 31 State Benches of Goods and Services Appellate Tribunal

(1) Eligibility:  
• **Judicial Members:** Judges of High Court, District and Additional District Judges and Advocates with specified years of experience  
• **Technical Member (Centre):** Serving or retired officers with at least 25 years of experience in Group A in Indian Revenue Service (Customs & Indirect Tax) or All India Services with at least 3 years of experience in indirect taxes or finance and tax in Central Government.  
• **Technical Member (State):** Serving or retired officers of All India Services or specified Officers of State Government with -atleast 25 years of experience in Group A or equivalent with at least 3 years of experience in indirect taxes or finance and tax in State Government.

(2) Minimum age to apply is 50 years (as on last date of application).  
(3) Pay is ₹225,000 (fixed) per month. All other allowances and other terms and conditions of service (DA, Medical etc.) shall be the same as applicable to Central Government officers carrying the same pay (presently an officer at Pay Level 17).  
(4) Further details regarding eligibility and other terms and conditions are available on the website of Department of Revenue: <https://www.dor.gov.in/gst-recruitment> or scan the QR code given in this advertisement.  
(5) Application may be submitted online in the link provided in the above website. The same can be submitted from 19.02.2024. The application, complete in all respects along with relevant attachments, may be submitted before 5:00 PM on 31.03.2024. cbc 15301/11/0006/2324

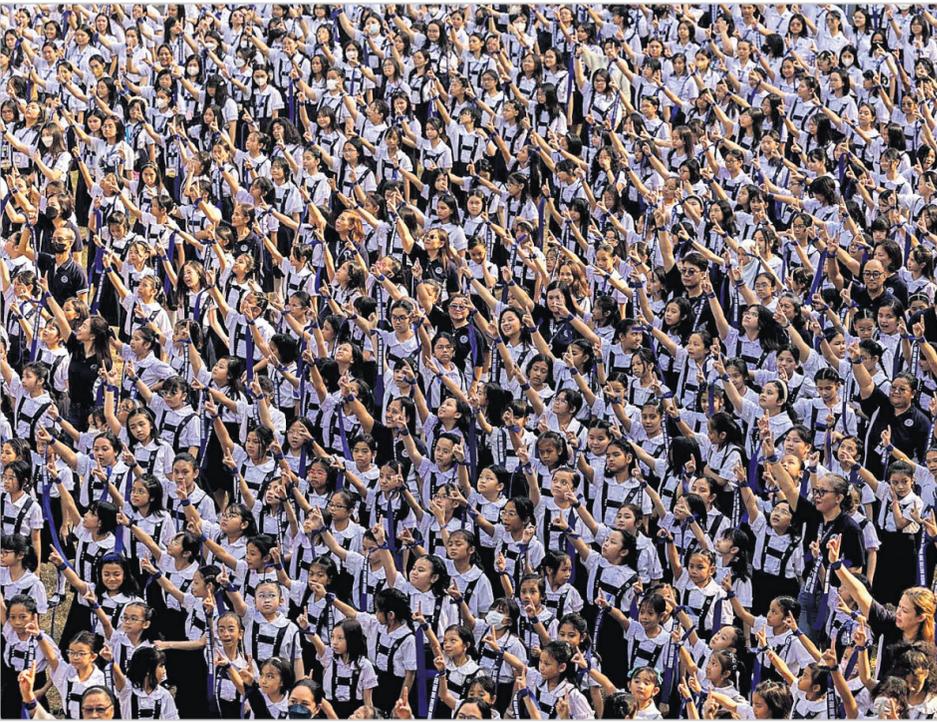
ଅଧ୍ୟକ୍ଷ ଯନ୍ତ୍ରୀଙ୍କ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟାଳୟ, (ରାସ୍ତା ଓ ଗୁହ) ବିଭାଜନ ନଂ. ୧, ଭୁବନେଶ୍ୱର  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, BHUBANESWAR (R & B) DIVISION NO. 1, BHUBANESWAR  
No. B- Email:- eebbsr1@yahoo.co.in, Phone/Fax: 06742597097

INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

No.1147 Date: 08.02.2024  
Bid Identification No.- C.C. (R&B)-01 e-Procurement Notice No.82 of 2023-24  
The Superintending Engineer, Bhubaneswar (R & B) Division No.-1, Bhubaneswar on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites Percentage Rate Bids in Single Cover System (Online) for the works as detailed in the table below.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Approximate Estimated cost put to Tender (Rs.)	Class of Contractor	Cost of Bid Documents (Rs.)	Period of Completion (in Calendar months)
1	SITC of 125kva DG set at Odisha School Education Programme Authority, Shiksha Soudha, Unit-V, Bhubaneswar	Rs. 14,42,583.00 (Excluding GST)	Manufacturer/ authorised dealer	Rs.6,000.00 (To be paid Online)	03 (Three) Calendar Months

The bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. The website for "ONLINE BIDDING" is <http://tendersorissa.gov.in>. Bid documents will be available in the above Website from 11.00 Hours of 13.02.2024 to 17.00 Hours of 20.02.2024. Bids of the above work shall be opened at 12.00 hours on 21.02.2024. The Bidder must possess matching class compatible Digital Signature Certificate (DSC). Further details and other terms and conditions can be seen from DTCN in the e-Procurement website [www.tendersorissa.gov.in](http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in) N.B.: Subsequent corrigendum / addendum if required shall be available in the website as indicated above. OIPR-34076/11/0014/2324 Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Bhubaneswar (R&B) Division No. 1, BBSR



Filipino students dance to take part in the One Billion Rising global campaign to end violence against women and advance gender equality, at St Scholastica's College in Manila, Philippines



Children rest outside, as Palestinians arrive in Rafah after they were evacuated from Nasser hospital in Khan Younis due to the Israeli ground operation, in the southern Gaza Strip



A vendor reacts as she poses for a photo at Adderley Street Flower Market in Cape Town, South Africa



A marching contingent of Delhi Police's women personnel during the 77th Raising Day parade of the force, at the New Police Lines in New Delhi



ISRO's latest meteorological satellite INSAT-3DS aboard GSLV-F14 all set for lift-off at 5:30 pm February 17 from the spaceport of Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh



A reveller is hit by oranges at an annual carnival battle in Ivrea, Italy



Supporters of the Grand Democratic Alliance attend a rally to protest against what they call vote-rigging in some constituencies in the parliamentary elections, on the outskirts of Hyderabad, Pakistan

## of the day quote

I cannot say anything about the future of the bloc because I'm not part of the national alliance's negotiating committee and also not part of INDIA bloc meetings. My information is only secondhand or even thirdhand. But I sincerely hope that all the remaining parties understand that the return of Modi and the BJP to the Centre will cause an existential crisis to the state-specific regional parties

P CHIDAMBARAM | CONGRESS LEADER

The contrast between the Modi Government and @INCIndia has never been more evident. On one hand, the regime's first response to the voice of the people is to label them as anti-national, terrorist, etc. And tear-gas them with drones. On the other, Rahul Gandhi interacts with farmers as equals, hearing their grievances, and learning from their experiences

JAIRAM RAMESH | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

The people of Uttar Pradesh re-elected the BJP in the state after witnessing the improved law and order situation

YOGI ADITYANATH | UP CM

## SHORT TAKES

### Basant, 7 others join J'khand govt

**Ranchi:** Basant Soren, JMM supremo Shibu Soren's youngest son, and seven others Friday took oath as ministers in Jharkhand's Chhampai Soren-led government. Basant is also the younger brother of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who is in judicial custody in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam. Besides him, the new face in the 11-member cabinet is JMM's Chaibasa MLA Deepak Birua. Basant Soren was elected as an MLA from Dumka assembly constituency, after he defeated BJP's Louis Marandi with a margin of 6,842 votes in a by-poll held in November 2020.

### BJP set for mega meet

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to lay down the BJP's agenda for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls at a two-day meeting of its national council, which will begin Saturday and be attended by nearly 11,500 party members, from elected panchayat heads to party district presidents and Union ministers. Party president J P Nadda will inaugurate the meeting and Modi will Sunday deliver the valedictory address, a speech which is likely to draw the broader contours of the BJP's campaign and exhort its members to go all out to achieve his target for the party to win 370 seats in the elections.

### Woman killed in IED explosion

**Chaibasa (Jharkhand):** An elderly woman was killed after an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) allegedly planted by the proscribed CPI (Maoists) exploded in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district, a senior police officer said Friday. The incident happened in a forest near Maradiri village Thursday, the police officer said, adding that the Maoists planted the IED to target security personnel. Randai Purty (56), a resident of Maradiri village, had gone to the forest to collect firewood when the explosive went off. A police team reached the spot Friday, recovered the body, and sent it to Chakrafarpur Sub-Divisional Hospital for post-mortem examination, the Superintendent of Police (SP) of West Singhbhum district, Ashutosh Shekhar, said.



**The ongoing tension and violence in Sandeshkhali, West Bengal due to the recent incident of harassment of women is a matter of great concern**  
MAYAWATI | BSP SUPREMO

### RAM TEMPLE TO BE SHUT FOR 1 HOUR EVERY DAY

Ayodhya's Ram temple will remain closed for an hour in the afternoon every day from Friday onwards, the chief priest of the Ram temple said



## Buses stay off roads, farmers block highways

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Ferozepur/Amritsar/Hisar/Muzaffarnagar (Punjab, Haryana), Feb 16:** Commuters in Punjab faced inconvenience Friday as buses stayed off the roads in response to the Samyukta Kisan Morcha's call for a 'Bharat Bandh' to press the government to accept farmers' demands including a legal guarantee of MSP.

Though there was a partial response to the bandh call in Haryana, markets and commercial establishments at several places in Punjab remained shut. However, the bandh passed off peacefully, officials said.

Farmers, owing allegiance to different factions, held demonstrations at several places and also blocked national highways in Pathankot, Tarn Taran, Bathinda and Jalandhar. They also laid siege to several toll plazas and raised slogans against the Centre for not accepting their demands.

In Haryana's Hisar, the bus services of the Haryana Roadways remained paralysed as its staff also supported the SKM's Bharat bandh call. The roadways employees held a demonstration on the premises of the



Tear gas being fired upon the protesting farmers at the Shambhu border during the Samyukta Kisan Morcha's (SKM) 'Bharat Bandh', in Patiala district, Friday

bus stand and raised slogans in support of their demands.

In Kurukshetra, the bandh call failed to evoke any response. Shops and markets remained open and buses were plying. Meanwhile, members of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Charuni) staged 'dharanas' at several toll plazas in Haryana. They did not let the toll authorities charge fee from commuters.

Protests were also held in parts of western Uttar Pradesh. Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait participated in a protest held at the

Bagovali crossing on the Delhi-Dehradun National Highway in Muzaffarnagar.

"We are holding the protest for the demands, including implementation of the Swaminathan Commission report, loan waiver etc," Tikait said. On being asked if he has any plans to go to Delhi, Tikait said, "A meeting is scheduled in Sisauli (Muzaffarnagar) Saturday, where planning for the future course of action will be made."

In Bijonr, BKU members disrupted work at some sugarcane weighing centres. In Baghpat, a

protest was held by BKU members. BKU district president Pratap Singh Gurjar said, "The symbolic protest in support of the bandh was called at Vandana Chowk. Farmers supported the call and they did not go to the sugarcane procurement centres."

Many farmer bodies, including Bharti Kisan Union (Rajewal), Bharatiya Kisan Union (Dakunda), Bharatiya Kisan Union (Lakhawal), Bharatiya Kisan Union (Qadian) and Kirti Kisan Union participated in the bandh.

Among various demands, the SKM is seeking a legal guarantee to minimum support price for all crops based on the Swaminathan commission formula and debt waiver.

Punjab Roadways, Punjab and PRTC Contract Workers' Union are also supporting the Samyukta Kisan Morcha's (SKM) bandh call. They are protesting against the Centre's proposed hit-and-run law.

Private bus operators were also not plying buses. Passengers were seen waiting for buses at many bus stands to reach their respective destinations. Mainly students and office-goers faced inconvenience because of the non-availability of buses.

## Sandeshkhali: NCSC recommends Prez rule



**A Congress team led by state president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury was stopped from visiting Sandeshkhali**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata/New Delhi, Feb 16:** Senior leaders of the BJP and the Congress were stopped by police Friday from visiting the trouble-torn Sandeshkhali, escalating the political tensions in the state as the leaders accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of fostering a "lawless situation" and attempting to "communalise" the issue.

In New Delhi, the National Commission for Scheduled Caste (NCSC) chief Arun Halder said the panel has recommended the imposition of President's rule in West Bengal in its report submitted to President Droupadi Murmu on alleged harassment of women by TMC supporters in Sandeshkhali, a day after a team from the Commission visited the area.

Sandeshkhali, a village in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, has been witnessing protests over alleged atrocities, including sexual abuse, by some TMC leaders against villagers and has triggered a fierce political blame game with the senior leaders of the Congress, which is part of the anti-BJP opposition bloc INDIA along with TMC at the national level, joining others to criticise the Mamata Banerjee government over the issue.

A delegation from the BJP, led by Union Ministers Pratima Bhoumik and Annapurna Devi, was stopped by the police at Rampur village on their route to

the Sandeshkhali block, evoking a sharp reaction as the ministers accused the TMC of instigating lawlessness. Later, they met West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose over the situation in Sandeshkhali.

A Congress team led by state president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury was also stopped from visiting Sandeshkhali. After a confrontation with the police, Chowdhury accused Banerjee of "politicising and communalising" the issue.

"Police stopped the BJP central team from visiting unrest-hit Sandeshkhali. Police cited prohibitory orders. We said only four of us would go, but we were not permitted," Union Minister Annapurna Devi, the convener of the team, told reporters. After being stopped at Rampur village, the six-member delegation of the saffron party sat on a dharna.

Bhoumik, the Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, also alleged that police were "trying to protect the culprits" and criticised their handling of the situation. "We are Union ministers and MPs, and there are certain protocols. The state police and the administration are not bothered about those protocols. Had police shown similar promptness in arresting Shahjahan Sheikh, the situation would have been different," Annapurna Devi said.

The BJP's fact-finding team was prevented from visiting Sandeshkhali under Section 144, leading them to propose sending only two women representatives to the area. However, this request was also denied, she added. "Are we criminals that we have been stopped from entering the area," BJP state general secretary Agnimitra Paul asked.

### Defence projects worth ₹84,560 crore cleared

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** The Defence Ministry Friday cleared procurement of military hardware worth Rs 84,560 crore including multi-mission maritime aircraft to boost overall combat capabilities of the armed forces.

The procurement proposals were cleared by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

The proposals cleared by the DAC include new generation anti-tank mines, air defence tactical control radar, heavy weight torpedoes, medium range maritime reconnaissance and multi-mission maritime aircraft, flight refueller aircraft and software defined radios.

The DAC approved procurement of medium range maritime reconnaissance and multi-mission maritime aircraft for strengthening the surveillance and interdiction capabilities of the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard, the Defence Ministry said.

A proposal to procure air defence tactical control radar was also approved with an aim to strengthen the air defence systems, especially the capabilities to detect slow, small and low-flying targets, it said.

"In order to enhance the operational efficiency and domination in the tactical battle area for engaging targets that are beyond visual line of sight by the mechanised forces, the AoN (approval of necessity) under Buy (Indian-IDDM) category has been accorded for procurement of canister launched anti-armour loiter munition system," the defence ministry said.

It said the DAC accorded AoN for procurement of Flight Refueller Aircraft for enhancing the operational capabilities and reach of the Indian Air Force.

## Law panel suggests rules for NRIs marrying Indian citizens

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** Describing as a "worrysome trend" the "rising" cases of fraudulent marriages between NRIs and Indian citizens, the Law Commission has recommended a comprehensive law to deal with the situation and compulsory registration of such alliances.

While presenting the report "Law on Matrimonial Issues Relating to Non-Resident Indians and Overseas Citizens of India" to the law ministry, panel chairman Justice (Retd) Ritu Raj Awasthi said the commission is of the opinion that the proposed central legislation should be comprehensive enough to cater to all facets involving marriages of NRIs as well as foreign citizens of Indian origin with that of Indian citizens.



"The rising occurrence of fraudulent marriages involving Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) marrying Indian partners is a worrisome trend. Several reports highlight an increasing pattern where these marriages turn out to be deceptive, putting Indian spouses, especially women, in precarious situations," Justice Awasthi said in his covering letter to Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal Thursday.

Such a legislation, the panel said, should be made applicable not only to the NRIs but also to those individuals who come within the definition of 'Overseas Citizens of India' (OCIs) as laid down in the Citizenship Act, 1955. "It is further recommended that all marriages between the NRIs/OCIs and Indian citizens should be made compulsorily registered in India," Justice Awasthi said.

## Kejriwal moves motion of confidence

**Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri claimed that Kejriwal, despite having the support of 62 MLAs, was bringing the trust vote motion that showed his confidence was shaken**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal moved a motion of confidence in the Assembly Friday, a day ahead of his appearance before a city court following an Enforcement Directorate complaint against him for skipping summonses in the excise policy case.

The motion will be discussed in the Assembly Saturday in presence of ruling Aam Aadmi Party MLAs and Leader of

Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri since seven of the eight BJP legislators were suspended for the remainder of the session for allegedly interfering during the Lt Governor's address Thursday.

This is the second time that the Kejriwal government has sought a trust vote in the 70-member Assembly. In the current Assembly, the AAP has 62 MLAs while the BJP has eight. Tabling the confidence motion Friday, the Chief Minister said, "Two MLAs had come to me saying they were contacted by BJP members offering them Rs 25 crore each. They were told that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will be arrested and the government will be toppled." "They were also told that the BJP is in touch with 21 MLAs. They have made mul-



multiple attempts to approach our MLAs under 'Operation Lotus'. Even this time, our MLAs refused to budge."

Kejriwal said the AAP checked with all its MLAs after these claims and it was found that seven of its legislators were approached, but none of them accepted the offer. He claimed that the Delhi excise policy case was

false. Kejriwal's trusted aides -- Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh -- are in jail in connection with the excise policy case.

"This so-called liquor scam is not a scam. The only aim is to topple the Delhi government by one means or another. AAP leaders were arrested under the guise of the scam. But even this effort was not successful. Not a single MLA of ours has defected and all our MLAs are still with us," the Chief Minister asserted in the House.

He said that the BJP knows that it can never win elections in Delhi and that's why they are using different tactics to topple the AAP government. "To show that none of our MLAs have defected, I present this resolution, 'The House expresses its trust in the cabinet,'" he said.

## MAN COLLAPSES, DIES AT AIRPORT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Feb 16:** An octogenarian Air India passenger, who had requested for a wheelchair at the Mumbai airport but decided to walk as he was asked to wait due to heavy demand for wheelchair, died after collapsing at the time of immigration process.

The incident happened at the airport February 12 after the passenger landed in an Air India flight from New York. An airline spokesperson Friday said the passenger was more than 80 years old.

In a statement Friday, Air India said that due to heavy demand for wheelchair, it had requested the passenger to wait for an airline staff-assisted wheelchair but he opted to walk along with his spouse.

## 1 in 5 cities under NCAP lacks real-time pollution data: Report

**AMONG INDIA'S TOP 10 POLLUTED CITIES IN JANUARY, TWO WERE IN BIHAR, TWO IN RAJASTHAN, TWO IN UTTAR PRADESH, ONE IN ASSAM, ONE IN HARYANA, AND ONE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** One in five cities covered under India's National Clean Air Programme does not have a continuous ambient air quality monitoring station (CAAQMS), according to a new analysis.

The report by the independent research organisation Centre for Research on Energy and

Clean Air (CREA) also said that Delhi was the most polluted city in the country in January with a monthly average PM2.5 concentration of 206 micrograms per cubic metre, surpassing the daily National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) each day of the month.

The daily average permissible limit (or NAAQS) for PM2.5 and PM10 is 60 micrograms per cubic



metre and 100 micrograms per cubic metre, respectively. Among India's top 10 polluted cities in

January, two were in Bihar, two in Rajasthan, two in Uttar Pradesh, one in Assam, one in

Haryana, and one in Himachal Pradesh.

The analysis by CREA showed that only 101 of the 131 cities covered under the NCAP have a CAAQMS installed as of January 2024, leaving 30 other cities without any transparent information on real-time pollution levels.

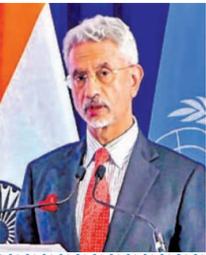
The 30 cities which do not have a CAAQMS include Ranchi, Jammu, Guntur, Nellore, Jammu, Vadodara, Madurai, and Raebareli, among others. The NCAP, initiated in 2019, aims for a 20-30 percent reduction in PM2.5 and PM10 concentrations by 2024 in 131 cities that had not met prescribed air quality standards from 2011 to 2015.

The government has now set

a new target of achieving a 40 percent reduction in particulate matter concentration in these cities by 2026. "The combination of low wind speed and cooler temperatures in northern India led to the formation of stable atmospheric conditions, hindering the rapid dispersion of emissions and resulting in the accumulation of pollutants near the ground, elevating ambient air pollution levels," said Sunil Dahiya, analyst at CREA.

"While natural atmospheric conditions are beyond human control, it is the baseline emissions that primarily contribute to the escalation of hazardous air pollution levels in any region," Dahiya said.

# international



Started my engagements at #MunichSecurityConference by meeting UK Foreign Secretary @David\_Cameron. A good discussion on our bilateral cooperation as well as global and regional issues

## JUDGE SETS DATE FOR TRUMP'S NY TRIAL

A state judge has ordered former President Donald Trump's criminal trial on alleged hush money payments to start March 25 -- in the middle of the Republican Party primaries -- while in Atlanta, uncertainty over the prosecutor's conduct clouded the timeline of a case charging him with election interference



# Curious deaths of Putin critics

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, THE DEATHS OR ATTEMPTED MURDERS OF PUTIN'S OPPONENTS UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE ATTRACTED ATTENTION

Alexei Navalny has become the latest in a string of deaths of critics of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Navalny, who was serving a 19-year sentence on charges of extremism, felt unwell after a walk, according to the Federal Penitentiary Service, and lost consciousness.

An ambulance arrived to try to revive him, but he died. It said the cause of death was "being established." Over his more than two decades at the top of the Kremlin, a number of Putin's opponents have suffered unfortunate fates including being jailed, shot dead in the street, or poisoned with tea spiked with polonium-210.

In the shadowy world of Russian politics, opposition to President Vladimir Putin often comes with a steep price - a price paid with the ultimate currency of life itself. In a chilling pattern that seems straight out of a spy novel, critics of Putin have been dropping like flies, their voices silenced by imprisonment, assassination, or poisoning. Alexei Navalny has become the latest in a string of deaths of critics of Putin.

From accidental falls from windows to hangings, poisonings and health issues, the fates of some of those who dared to challenge the Kremlin are myriad.

### Alexei Navalny

Born to factory owners in a village west of Moscow, Alexei Navalny grew to become perhaps the highest-profile critic of Putin's time in power. His political activism, including extensive investigations into high-level corruption and running to be mayor of Moscow, gained him fame - and many believed he posed a threat to Mr Putin. It was in August 2020 when his fight against the Russian President hit the global headlines. German medics confirmed that he had been poisoned with novichok - a Soviet-era nerve agent - and his recovery took months. Despite the danger, Navalny elected to return to Russia where he was later arrested, convicted on charges he says are politically



motivated, and sent to a Russian penal colony.

### Yevgeny Prigozhin

Whether or not Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner Group mercenaries, had indeed died in August 2023 when his plane crashed in the Tver region of Russia was initially unclear - though his name appeared on the passenger list for the flight. But Russian authorities said four days after the crash that DNA tests had confirmed that he was one of the 10 passengers who perished.

### Anna Politkovskaya

On 7 October 2006, Putin's birthday - journalist Anna Politkovskaya was shot in the lobby of her apartment building. Before her death, she had specialised in investigating human rights abuses in Chechnya and corruption more broadly. Her killing led to claims that Putin had not done enough to protect the media.

### Boris Nemtsov

A former deputy Prime Minister of Russia under President Boris Yeltsin, Boris Nemtsov was a fierce critic of



Police detain Alexei Navalny during a rally, in Moscow, June 12, 2019

Putin and a prominent Opposition leader. He had been working on a report examining Russia's role in the conflict in Ukraine in 2015. But, aged 55, he was killed before it was finished. Nemtsov was shot dead on a bridge just metres from the Kremlin as he walked home at night with his girlfriend.

### Sergei Yushenkov

Liberal Russian politician Sergei Yushenkov was shot dead in a Moscow suburb in 2003. A

member of the State Duma and former colonel in the Soviet army, Yushenkov was shot several times outside his apartment building. He had been involved in setting up the Liberal Russia Party, which had achieved full registration just hours before he was killed.

### Sergei Skripal

Formerly a colonel with Russian military intelligence before leaving in 1999, Sergei Skripal went on to work at the country's Foreign Ministry until 2003. He was arrested in Moscow a year later and confessed to having been recruited by British intelligence in 1995. In 2018, along with his daughter, he was poisoned with the nerve agent novichok but the pair survived the attack.

### Denis Voronenkov

A former Russian politician, Denis Voronenkov was an outspoken critic of Putin. Previously a member of the communist faction in the lower house of Russian Parliament, Voronenkov fled to Ukraine in 2016 and was granted Ukrainian citizenship. He was shot and

killed in Kyiv in March 2017.

### Ravil Maganov

The chairman of the board of Russia's second largest oil producer Lukoil, Ravil Maganov had openly criticised the war in Ukraine. In a statement in March 2022, the board called for the "soonest termination of the armed conflict" and expressed "sincere empathy for all victims". It added: "We strongly support a lasting ceasefire and a settlement of problems through serious negotiations and diplomacy." In September that year, 67-year-old Maganov died after apparently falling from a sixth-floor window at the Central Clinical Hospital in Moscow.

### Alexander Litvinenko

A former agent with the Russian FSB security service, Alexander Litvinenko fled Russia and eventually gained British citizenship. He had accused Putin of corruption and also blamed him for the infamous Moscow apartment bombings which Putin, then Prime Minister, had used as a reason to start the Second Chechen War in 1999. Litvinenko died in November 2006, weeks after drinking tea that had been poisoned with polonium-210, a rare and very potent radioactive isotope.

### Paul Klebnikov

Investigative journalist, Paul Klebnikov, an American of Russian descent, was killed outside his office in a drive-by shooting in Moscow in 2004. He was the editor of Forbes Russia and had written about corruption. Forbes had also published a list of the country's richest people.

There are now no Opposition leaders of such prominence left in Russia. For some young urban Russians, Navalny offered hope of an alternative future to Putin, who has served as Russia's paramount leader longer than anyone since Josef Stalin.

Navalny long forecast Russia could face seismic political turmoil because he said Putin built a brittle system of personal rule reliant on corruption.

# World leaders blame Putin for Navalny's death in prison



Protesters stand opposite the Russian Embassy in London

World leaders and Russian opposition activists wasted no time in blaming the reported death of Alexei Navalny on President Vladimir Putin and his government.

US President Joe Biden Friday blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin for Alexei Navalny's death, saying he was "not surprised" but "outraged" by the Opposition leader's passing.

"It is obvious that he was killed by Putin," said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who was visiting Berlin as he sought aid for his country as it fights off an invasion by Russia.

"Putin doesn't care who dies - only for him to hold his position. This is why he must hold onto nothing. Putin must lose everything and be held responsible for his deeds," Zelenskyy added.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose country temporarily took in Navalny in 2020 after he was poisoned with a nerve agent, said the Kremlin critic's death makes clear "what kind of regime this is."

Navalny was "brutally murdered by the Kremlin," said Latvian President Edgars Rinklevics in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

"If this is true, then no matter the formal cause the responsibility for the premature death is Vladimir Putin personally, who first gave the green light to the poisoning of Alexei and then put him in prison," said Mikhail Khodorkovsky, an exiled Russia tycoon turned opposition figure in exile, speaking in an online statement. Other Russian Opposition activists echoed him.

"If it is confirmed, the death of Alexei is a murder. Organised by Putin," Opposition politician Dmitry Gudkov said on social

### 'He was healthy & happy'

The mother of Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny was quoted by Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta as saying that her son had been "alive, healthy and happy" when she last saw him February 12. His wife led calls Friday at a Western security gathering for Russian President Vladimir Putin to be held accountable for the jailed Kremlin opponent's death.

media. Former world chess champion-turned-opposition activist Garry Kasparov said "Putin tried and failed to murder Navalny quickly and secretly with poison, and now he has murdered him slowly and publicly in prison."

Pyotr Verzilov, a prominent member of the Russian protest group Pussy Riot, said "Navalny was murdered in prison." In a post on X, Verzilov added: "We will definitely take revenge and destroy this regime."

Western officials also blamed Putin and his government. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Navalny's death showed that "Putin fears nothing more than dissent from his own people."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Russia has questions to answer if the reports are true.

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told NPR that if Navalny's death is confirmed, "it's a terrible tragedy and, given the Russian government's long and sordid history of doing harm to its opponents, it raises real and obvious questions about what happened here."

# PML-N, PPP meeting postponed: Report



Islamabad, Feb 16: A meeting between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) coordination committees, which was expected to take place Friday for finalising government formation in the Centre, has been postponed, according to a media report.

The meeting was reportedly postponed as the PML-N's committee has yet to consult on the matter with the party's senior leadership, Geo News reported. The second round of talks between the two parties to decide on the power-sharing formula between them for the formation of a coalition government will be held Saturday, it said.

A scheduled second round of talks between the Contact and Coordination Committees (CCCs) of the PPP and PML-N could not take place on Thursday, as both sides sought more time to assess proposals that came up in their first meeting. Earlier, the Dawn newspaper reported that the next meeting

# Egypt building wall near Gaza border

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dubai, Feb 16: Egypt is building a wall and is levelling land near its border with the Gaza Strip ahead of a planned Israeli offensive targeting the border city of Rafah, satellite images analysed Friday.

Egypt, which has not publicly acknowledged the construction, repeatedly has warned Israel not to forcibly expel the over 1 million Palestinians now displaced in Rafah across the border into its territory while Israeli troops battle the militant group Hamas for a fifth month.

However, the preparations on the Egyptian side of the border in the Sinai Peninsula suggest Cairo is preparing for just that scenario, something that could threatened its 1979 peace deal with Israel that's been a linchpin for regional security.

The Egyptian government did not respond to requests for comment Friday from the AP. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry February 11 issued a statement warning Israel over its possible Rafah offensive and its "displacement of the Palestinian people." The satellite images, taken Thursday by Maxar Technologies, show construction ongoing on the wall, which sits along the Sheikh Zuweid-Rafah Road some 3.5 kilometers (2 miles) west of the border with Gaza.

The images show cranes, trucks and what appear to be precast concrete barriers being set up along the road. Those satellite images correspond to features seen in a video released by the London-



based Sinai Foundation for Human Rights on February 12. The video shows a crane lifting concrete walls into place along the road.

Egypt is building a fortified buffer zone near its border with the Gaza Strip as fears mount of an imminent Israeli ground invasion of the southern city of Rafah, which could displace hundreds of thousands of Palestinians across the frontier

The construction "is intended to create a high-security gated and isolated area near the borders with the Gaza Strip, in preparation for the reception of Palestinian refugees in the case of (a) mass exodus," the foundation said. Nearby as well, construction crews appear to be levelling and

clearing ground for an unknown purpose. That can also be seen in imagery from Planet Labs PBC of the area. The Wall Street Journal, quoting anonymous Egyptian officials, described "an 8-square-mile (20-square-kilometer) walled enclosure" being built in the area that could accommodate over 1,00,000 people.

Homes and farmland in the area previously had been razed during Egypt's war on an affiliate of the Islamic State group in the area.

Hard-line officials within Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government have raised the possibility of pushing Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip, something strongly opposed by Israel's main ally, the United States. The Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank are lands the Palestinians hope to have for their future state.

The Israeli military referred questions regarding Egypt's construction to Netanyahu's office, which did not respond.

## SNIPPETS

### HK cracks its biggest money laundering case

Beijing/Hong Kong: At least seven persons were arrested by Hong Kong customs authorities Friday in connection with the territory's biggest money-laundering case involving a whopping HKD 14 billion (\$1.8 billion) some of it was linked to a mobile app scam case in India. The syndicate used "stooge" bank accounts and shell companies to transfer the largest amount linked to a single case recorded in the city, the Customs and Excise Department of Hong Kong said. The operation was linked to a mobile app scam in India and two jewellery companies in the country, which allegedly handled about HKD2.9 billion (\$371 million) of the funds, Suzzette Ip Tung-ching, the head of customs' financial investigation bureau told the media in Hong Kong.



### Double trouble for Sunak

London: After suffering two heavy blows to his leadership ahead of a general election later this year, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak Friday blamed "low voter turnout" as a reason for the Opposition Labour Party overturning strong Conservative majorities to win by-elections in England. Reacting to the disastrous outcome in two previously Tory-held seats, the 43-year-old said they were "particularly challenging" by-elections. However, he stressed that the results did not reflect "enthusiasm" for the Opposition Labour Party. "Midterm by-elections are always difficult for incumbent governments, and the circumstances of these by-elections were of course particularly challenging," he told reporters during a trip to Essex.



### Gaza hospital runs out of oxygen

Rafah (Gaza Strip): Five patients in intensive care died after their oxygen cut off in southern Gaza's main hospital that was stormed by Israeli troops, causing chaos for hundreds of staff and wounded inside, health officials said Friday. Troops were searching the complex where the military said it believes the remains of hostages abducted by Hamas might be located. The raid came after troops had besieged Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis for nearly a week, with staff, patients and others inside struggling under heavy fire and dwindling supplies, including food and water. The Israeli military said Friday it had detained dozens from the facility, including some it alleged were involved in Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel.



## of the day quote

Nationalism is important, paramount. We have to subscribe to it. Time for us to subscribe to economic nationalism as well. We need to be vocal for local



JAGDEEP DHANKHAR | VICE PRESIDENT

As millennials and GenZ are digital natives, it is quite natural for them to prefer technologically centric financial service providers



PRATEEK PANT | CHIEF BUSINESS OFFICER, WHITEOAK CAPITAL

India on a long term basis has a great growth potential. It's a very appealing market. Therefore, we will try to seek various opportunities and if we can find another opportunity that would replace this type of plan



HIROKI TOTOKI | PRESIDENT, COO & CFO, SONY

## SHORT TAKES

### Electric mobility: M&M, VW ink pact

**Berlin:** Volkswagen (VW) and Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd (M&M) have signed a supply agreement on the use of key electric components of the German carmaker's open platform for electric vehicles (EVs), the companies said in a statement Friday. Mahindra plans to use certain platform components, as well as Volkswagen's unified battery cell, for its own electric platform, called INGLO, the companies said. The Indian company will be the first external partner to use the unified cell, a new cell technology that Volkswagen plans to use for 80% of its battery cells and promises will reduce costs by half. Volkswagen said the agreement would run "over several years" and have a total volume of about 50 gigawatt hours of energy storage capacity over its lifetime.

### Power supply: NTPC, NALCO sign pact

**New Delhi:** State-owned NTPC Friday said it has inked an initial agreement with NALCO to supply over 1,200 MW of round-the-clock power for the aluminium maker's operations in Odisha. The MoU was signed in the presence of Dillip Kumar Patel, Director (HR), NTPC, and Jagdish Arora, Director (Project & Technical), NALCO in the national capital, the power producer said in a statement. "NTPC signed a non-binding MoU with National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) to supply about 1,200 MW or more of round-the-clock uninterrupted power to cater to the requirement of NALCO for its expansion of smelter plant capacity in Angul, Odisha," the statement said. The supply options would include coal-based thermal, solar, wind, energy storage or any combination of the same, it added.

### RE enters Turkiye

**New Delhi:** Mid-sized motorcycle maker Royal Enfield Friday announced its foray into the Turkish market through a distribution partnership with K-Rides Motosiklet ve Bisiklet San Ve Tic AS, a subsidiary of Kibar Holding. K-Rides Motosiklet ve Bisiklet San Ve Tic AS will be the official distributor partner in Turkiye. The first flagship store is set to open in Istanbul this spring, Royal Enfield said in a statement. Through the partnership a lineup of motorcycles including Bullet, Classic, HNTR, Meteor, Super Meteor, Interceptor, Continental GT, the new Himalayan and the Shotgun, featuring engine displacements of 350cc and 650cc will be sold in the country, it added.



**Crypto currencies cannot be called currencies as they don't have any underlying value**

P VASUDEVAN | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RBI

## OLA OFFERS HEFTY DISCOUNTS

IPO bound E-scooter maker Ola Electric has cut the price of its S1 range of Ola Electric scooters by ₹25,000, the company said Friday. The revised prices will be effective in February only, Ola said. Price of the Ola S1 X+ has been cut from ₹1.09 lakh to ₹84,999. Price of Ola S1 Air has been cut from ₹1.19 lakh to ₹1.05 lakh. Meanwhile, price of Ola S1 Pro has been cut to ₹1.30 lakh, down from ₹1.48 lakh previously



# SPICEJET EYES GO FIRST

SpiceJet's Ajay Singh along with Busy Bee Airways bids for bankrupt Go First

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** SpiceJet chief Ajay Singh along with Busy Bee Airways has put in a bid for bankrupt Go First as the budget carrier looks to strengthen its operations with more slots and international flying rights of Go First.

The announcement comes at a time when the crisis-hit SpiceJet is raising funds and rationalising costs, including by laying off more than 1,000 staff



In a release Friday, SpiceJet said the bid for Go First has been submitted by Singh in his personal capacity along with Busy Bee Airways Pvt Ltd. Separately, Sharjah-based Sky One FZE said it has also submitted a bid for Go First.

Go First, which stopped flying May 3, 2023, and its plea for voluntary insolvency resolution proceedings was admitted by

the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) May 10 last year.

"SpiceJet's role as the operating partner for the new airline involves providing essential staff, services, and industry expertise. This collaboration is anticipated to generate synergies between the two carriers, leading to improved cost man-

agement, revenue growth, and a strengthened market position within the Indian aviation industry," the release said.

The release did not mention any details about Busy Bee Airways.

According to data available with the corporate affairs ministry, Busy Bee Airways was incorporated on April 19, 2017 in Delhi and has a paid up capital of ₹1 lakh.

Singh, who is the Chairman and Managing Director of SpiceJet, said that he firmly believes that Go First holds immense potential and can be revitalised to work in close synergy with SpiceJet, benefiting both carriers.

For SpiceJet, the release said that serving as the service provider for Go First will provide significant opportunities for revenue expansion.

"Coordinated route planning

Apart from coveted slots at domestic and international airports, international traffic rights, and an order for over 100 Airbus Neo planes, Go First is a trusted and valued brand among flyers. I am happy to contribute to the efforts aimed at reviving this popular airline and leveraging its strengths for mutual growth and success

AJAY SINGH | CHIEF, SPICEJET

initiatives are poised to enhance passenger traffic and drive ticket sales for both airlines. By strategically aligning their flight schedules and destinations, SpiceJet and the new airline can capture a larger share of the market and cater to diverse passenger needs effectively," the release said.

SpiceJet, which has been facing multiple headwinds, including financial woes and legal battles - is raising funds and has received an amount of ₹744 crore.

The company has also initiated the process to raise an additional ₹1,000 crore, the release said.

On February 13, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) extended the deadline for another 60 days to complete the insolvency resolution process of Go First.

# D-St extends win run to fourth day

Indian shares market continued its broad-based recovery, aided by positive global cues



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Feb 16:** Equity benchmark indices marched higher for the fourth straight session on Friday, with Nifty closing above the 22,000 level, tracking gains in blue chips like L&T, Infosys and M&M, amid a firm trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 376.26 points or 0.52 per cent to close at 72,426.64. The index touched a high of 72,545.33 and a low of 72,218.10 during intraday trade.

The broader NSE Nifty also climbed 129.95 points or 0.59 per cent to end at points 22,040.70.

"A surge in buying interest for large-cap stocks propelled the Nifty back above the recent consolidation level, leading to the highest-ever closing on the weekly timeframe," said Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst, LKP Securities.

Wipro was the biggest gainer in the Sensex chart, rising 4.79 per cent, followed by M&M, L&T, Tata Motors, Maruti, Infosys, Nestle India and IndusInd Bank. Shares of M&M shot up 3.96 per

cent to finish at ₹1,835.55 apiece after it announced its supply agreement with German automotive major Volkswagen Group for electric vehicle components under their joint vision for electric mobility collaboration.

In contrast, PowerGrid, SBI, Reliance, NTPC and Axis Bank were among the laggards.

Among sectoral indices, auto surged 2.17 per cent, followed by realty (1.53 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.41 per cent), capital goods (1.38 per cent) and healthcare (1.26 per cent). Utilities, oil & gas, power and energy indices declined up to 0.80 per cent. BSE smallcap index rose 0.68 per cent, while the midcap closed with a gain of 0.78 per cent.

In the previous session, the 30-share index climbed 227.55 points or 0.32 per cent to close at 72,050.38 points, while NSE Nifty gained 70.70 points or 0.32 per cent to end at 21,910.75.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets Thursday as they sold shares worth ₹3,064.15 crore, according to exchange data.

## Akasa Air to fly beyond Indian skies

**NEW DELHI:** In less than two years of commencing operations, Akasa Air will start international services with its first flight to Doha from Mumbai March 28. "Starting 28 March 2024, Akasa Air will operate four non-stop flights a week, connecting Mumbai with Doha, enhancing air connectivity between Qatar and India," the airline said in a release. Akasa Air founder and CEO Vinay Dube said its foray into Qatar marks the next phase of growth as it continues the journey towards becoming one of the world's top 30 airlines by the turn of this decade. Currently, five Indian airlines operate international flights -- Air India, Air India Express, Vistara, IndiGo and SpiceJet. India is one of the fastest growing civil aviation markets in the world and plans are afoot to develop international hubs in the country to tap the growth potential.

## UNDER COMPANIES LAW

### Govt starts centralised processing of filings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** The government has operationalised the central processing centre for processing filings under the companies law and LLP Act in a "time-bound and faceless manner" as part of efforts to further improve the ease of doing business.

Initially, 12 forms and applications under the companies law will be processed at the Central Processing Centre (CPC). From April 1 onwards, other forms and applications will be processed through the centre.

"As of now, 4,910 forms have been received by CPC after commencing operations. The forms shall be processed a time-bound and faceless manner," the corporate affairs ministry said in a release Friday.

Later, forms/applications filed under Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act are also proposed to be centralised.

Based on filing trends, the ministry said it is expected that about 2.50 lakh forms will be processed through CPC annually, once it is fully operational.

With the establishment of CPC, the ministry noted that jurisdictional Registrar of Companies (RoC) will have to focus more on their core functions of inquiries, inspection and investigation for ensuring robust corporate governance.

The ministry, which implements the companies and LLP laws, has already operationalised the Central Registration Centre (CRC) and Centralised Processing for Accelerated Corporate Exit (C-PACE).

CRC, C-PACE and CPC will ensure speedy processing of applications and forms filed for incorporation, closure and for meeting regulatory requirements so that the companies are incorporated, closed, can alter and raise capital, and are able to complete their various compliances under the corporate laws with ease, it said.

A total of 1,02,063 companies and LLPs were incorporated in FY 2013-14 and the count rose 92 per cent to 1,95,586 in FY 2022-23.

The ministry said that incorporation of companies and LLPs till February 14 of the current financial year has been the highest as compared to any of the previous financial years.

## BIZ BUZZ

### BoM holds conference on 'Export Opportunities for MSME Women Entrepreneurs of Odisha'

BHUBANESWAR:

The 'Export Opportunities for MSME Women Entrepreneurs of Odisha' event held at Hotel Presidency, Bhubaneswar, witnessed a gathering of eminent personalities and stakeholders dedicated to empowering women in the MSME sector. This was a joint initiative taken by ICC National Women's Entrepreneurship Council (INWEC) and Federation of Indian Export Organisation (FIEO), Odisha Chapter, Ministry of Commerce, Government of India in association with Bank of Maharashtra (BoM). The government dignitaries present in the conference were Madhab Chandra Mishra, IRS, Commissioner office, Customs (Pev), Bhubaneswar; Bimalendu Ray, OAS, (S.S) DIRECTOR, DEP & M, Odisha; Alok Kumar Mishra, Zonal Manager, Bank of Maharashtra, Bhubaneswar; Kamal Sahoo, Head, FIEO, OC, MOC, GOI; Preeti Patnaik, Convenor, INWEC and JB Pany, Chairman, ICC Odisha State Council. The guests uplifted the occasion with their presence and insightful contributions. The event emphasised key takeaways for women MSME entrepreneurs, highlighting the potential for growth and expansion through participation in the larger business ecosystem. It underscored the importance of public-private partnerships in skill development, entrepreneurship education and consultancy services for women entrepreneurs. Participants also discussed the significance of real-time information access, digitalization and diversification of export baskets to enhance the competitiveness of women-led MSMEs in Odisha. The technical session ranged topics from 'Local to Global', 'Role of foreign post office' to 'Documentations for sea & Air Cargo clearance'. INWEC and Bank of Maharashtra felicitated all the dignitaries with a token of gratitude and acknowledgement at the end of the conference and thanked all the participants and speakers for their valuable presence which made this conference a success.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 16:** Fintech firm One97 Communications -- owner of the brand Paytm -- has shifted its nodal account to Axis Bank from Paytm Payments Bank.

The move will allow continuity of Paytm QR, Soundbox, card machine after the March 15 set by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), as per a regulatory filing.

The RBI has advised customers and merchants of Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to shift their accounts to other banks by March 15, giving 15 more days to the beleaguered entity to close most of its operations, including deposit and credit transactions.

"The company has also shifted its nodal account to Axis Bank (by opening an escrow account) to continue seamless merchant settlements as before. This arrangement is expected to seamlessly replace the nodal account that OCL was using with Paytm Payments Bank. Paytm Payment Services Ltd (PPSL), OCL's wholly owned subsidiary has already been using the Axis

# Paytm shifts nodal acc to Axis Bank

RBI asks Patym Payments Bank customers to shift to other banks by March 15



Highway toll collector IHMCL removes Paytm Payments Bank from list of banks authorised to issue FASTag

Bank services since its inception," Paytm said in a filing.

The nodal account of Paytm is like a master account in which all its customers, merchant transactions are settled.

The RBI in the list of FAQs has clarified that Paytm QR code, Paytm Soundbox or Paytm POS terminal will continue to work after March 15 if it is linked to other banks instead of PPBL.

"We are committed to providing seamless service to our

merchant partners, with focus on compliance and regulatory guidelines. We assure our users that the Paytm app, and our pioneering devices like Paytm QR, Soundbox, Card Machine will continue to work as always. The shift of the nodal account to Axis Bank (by opening an Escrow Account) will ensure seamless merchant settlements as before. We strive to continue to empower Indians, contributing significantly to the country's financial inclusion journey," a Paytm spokesperson said.

The RBI has advised PPBL customers to obtain a fresh QR code linked to an account with another bank or wallet to receive payments after March 15. "You may also change your bank account details (in which you receive payments) through your service provider," Paytm management had said earlier this month.

Paytm will also work with other banks to change the virtual payment address linked to PPBL that merchants use for accepting transactions, so that there is no disruption in their transactions after the RBI set a deadline.

# Tech revenue to touch \$254bn this fiscal: Nasscom

THE PROJECTED 3.8% GROWTH IS DESPITE A 50% SLIDE IN TECH SPENDING AND 6% DIP IN TECH CONTRACTS IN 2023 GLOBALLY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Feb 16:** The domestic technology industry's revenue is projected to grow 3.8 per cent to \$254 billion this fiscal, industry body Nasscom said Friday and highlighted creation of 60,000 more jobs during this period.

The industry had clocked a revenue of \$244.6 billion in the same period last year, according to Nasscom's annual strategic review report.

Excluding hardware, the revenue is expected to touch \$199 billion, a growth of 3.3 per cent over FY23, as per the report. Domestic revenue is estimated to log 5.9 per cent growth at \$54.4 billion from \$51.4 billion in FY23.

This means the industry has added \$9.3 billion incremental revenue in the fiscal, Nasscom said.

The growth in the domestic revenue was primarily driven by government and enterprise spending.



Nasscom President Debjani Ghosh said that some of the tailwinds that stood out for the industry last year was the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), adding that India continues to be the preferred hub for GCC countries and this is getting even stronger.

"As we see companies, as we see the GCC scope of work moving from just back and work to

more of R&D and more of innovation, this is where the India attraction goes up significantly, primarily driven by talent and political stability and ease of doing business," Ghosh added.

The Engineering Research & Development (ERD) sector alone contributed 48 per cent to the total export revenue addition in FY24, Nasscom said.

The ERD sector, she said was

2023 was a growth year despite all the headwinds, the surprise here was that while export slowed down a bit we definitely saw a significant increase into domestic market including the business for tech services. I think it was the fastest growth we have seen in domestic market

DEBJANI GHOSH | PRESIDENT, NASSCOM

expected to do well but looks better than expectation and it has overall been tremendously positive for India. "Going forward, this is going to be one sector that we should watch out for."

According to Nasscom, while there was a marginal growth in the deal pipeline, the big change was the change in the deal size, which spiked 70 per cent.

She said while there was a lot of talk about job losses in the face of AI, the industry grew in terms

of employment. Despite reports of massive retrenchments, the industry added net 60,000 jobs, taking the total headcount to 5.43 million in the year.

"We hired around 60,000 people in addition to over and above last year. (But) what we are seeing definitely there is a correction because there was also a lot of over hiring done during the Covid years. So we are seeing some level of correction happening which is expected and needed for the industry," Ghosh stated.

Nasscom said it is seeing the hiring moving towards jobs in AI, data, clouds, cyber security.

"So the frontier technologies is where we are seeing the demand growing and the industry is putting a lot of efforts to ensure that we continue to up-skill existing workforce," she added. Globally, she said, nearly 6,50,000 employees are being trained on generative AI skills.

OPENER'S ATTACKING HUNDRED PUTS INDIA UNDER PRESSURE AS VISITORS RACE TO 207/2 AT STUMPS ON DAY 2 AFTER HOSTS POST 445 IN THEIR FIRST INNINGS OF 3RD TEST

# Duckett gives England edge



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Rajkot, Feb 16:** Ben Duckett's power-packed hundred overshadowed R Ashwin's monumental feat as England thrived on their belligerent Bazball tactic to reach 207/2 at stumps on day two and put India under pressure in the third Test here Friday. Ashwin (1/37) dismissed Zak Crawley (15) in the final session to join Anil Kumble as the second Indian, and ninth overall, to take 500 wickets in Test history. But India's struggles to contain England's fearless and enterprising batters persisted as Duckett raced to his third Test hundred (133 batting, 118b, 21x4, 2x6) off only 88 balls. England have already wiped off a chunk of their first innings deficit and trail India by 238 runs going into day three. India ended up with 445 in their first innings. At one stage, Duckett even flirted briefly with the prospect of breaking Gilbert Jessop's record from 1902 for fastest Test ton (77 balls) for his country. Duckett peppered

**India were handed a 5-run penalty for a second offence of their batters running on the middle of the pitch as England started their first innings at 5/0 without even a ball being bowled. India were penalised as a result of all-rounder Ravichandran Ashwin running along the middle of the pitch. Ashwin was reprimanded by on-field umpire Joel Wilson. Earlier, Ravindra Jadeja was also guilty of committing the same offence**

the field with powerful strokes all around the ground. Joe Root was at the other end on nine. Ashwin struck immediately after his introduction into the attack to send Crawley packing, with the batter gift-wrapping his wicket to help the Indian spinner complete his milestone. On an innocuous delivery from around the wicket, Crawley managed a connection that ballooned towards Rajat Patidar at short fine leg. Patidar only had to make a few paces on his left to grab the ball over his shoulder as each of Ashwin's teammates rushed to celebrate the feat. The diminutive England opener Duckett, who looked a tad tentative outside the off-stump before the tea break, came

out all guns blazing to bring up his first fifty of the tour, in just 39 balls with 11 hits to the fence. The introduction of spin did slow down Duckett's pace for a short while, but he hit the top gear quickly to keep the Indian bowlers under pressure. A pivotal moment came in the 21st over from Bumrah in his second spell with the Indian spearhead nailing a perfect yorker. With his front foot out of the way, it appeared on the first instance that the ball crashed into the wickets. However, umpire Kumar Dharmasena was not as convinced as the bowler got his captain to ask for DRS intervention. The replays showed Duckett had done incredibly well to con-

nect with the ferocious yorker with the bottom of his bat. Each of the three DRS reviews per innings would weigh in gold if the pitch continues to be as placid as it has been for the first two days, but this was a review which India would not have mind losing. India took the second DRS against Ollie Pope when Mohammed Siraj, deployed on short-ball tactics, pitched a fuller one to hit the pads. Umpire Joel Wilson was unmoved but he had to overturn his appeal with the replays confirming that the ball was hitting the leg stump, ending Pope's entertaining stay (39, 55b, 5x4, 1x6). Ashwin returned for the final over of the day to have one more crack. His fourth delivery turned sharply away from Duckett after pitching on leg and Rohit Sharma collected a catch believing there was an edge. However, it culminated with replays showing the ball pitching outside leg and missing the bat completely, with India starting at a long third day in the field with only one DRS appeal left. Earlier in the day, India's lower order did a fair job of collecting as many runs as possible before being bowled out for 445. Debutant Dhruv Jurel (46, 104b, 2x4, 3x6) missed out on a fifty in his maiden outing. The highlight of his knock was an uppercut off Mark Wood's 146 kmph delivery, which sent the ball flying into the stands over a helpless slip cordon. Jurel partnered with Ashwin (39) to add 77 runs for the eighth wicket which pushed India past the 400-run mark while also steadying the ship after centurion Ravindra Jadeja (112) and Kuldeep Yadav (4) fell early. Bumrah (28) and Siraj (3) did their best in keeping England out on the park for longer with a quick 30-run stand from 42 balls.

**BRIEF SCORES**

India 445 (Dhruv Jurel 46, R Ashwin 39, Jasprit Bumrah 28; Mark Wood 4/114, Rehan Ahmed 2/85); England 207/2 (Ben Duckett 133 batting, Ollie Pope 39; R Ashwin 1/37). Match to continue.

# Ashwin withdraws from 3rd Test

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Rajkot, Feb 16:** Senior off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin Friday withdrew from the ongoing third Test between India and England owing to a family medical emergency, hours after touching the coveted milestone of 500 Test wickets. BCCI provided an update on the development. "Ravichandran Ashwin has withdrawn from the Test squad, effective immediately due to a family medical emergency. In these challenging times, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the team fully supports Ashwin," BCCI said in a media release. The Indian Cricket Board did not reveal the exact reason for Ashwin's withdrawal and requested all to respect the cricketer's privacy. "The BCCI extends its heartfelt support to the champion cricketer and his family. The health and well-being of the players and their loved ones are of utmost importance. The Board requests respect for the privacy of Ashwin and his family as they navigate through this challenging time," the statement added further. Ashwin, who attended the post match media conference to speak on his milestone, flew back to Chennai. "The Board and the team will continue to provide any necessary assistance to Ashwin and will keep the lines of communication open to offer support as needed. Team India appreciates the understanding and empathy of the fans and media during this sensitive period," BCCI secretary Jay Shah was quoted as saying in the release. India will play the remainder of the third Test with 10 men and four specialist bowlers. It is understood that Ashwin might not be available for the remaining two Test matches in Ranchi (Feb 25-29) and Dharamsala (March 7-11).

**Jumbo feat not in Ashwin's mind**

Ashwin is a content man after becoming only the second Indian to take 500 Test wickets and has no interest in chasing Anil Kumble's national record of 619 scalps. Ashwin dismissed England opener Zak Crawley in the final session on day two and became only the ninth bowler to scale 'Mount 500' in Test history. The 37-year-old Ashwin said



he has no particular aim of pushing for more and try and get to the record of Kumble, who is known as 'Jumbo'. "The very simple answer is 'no'... 120 wickets away. Every day is what I want to live for, and, I'm 37 years old. I don't know what's in store next," Ashwin told the media here after stumps on the second day. "What's in store for the next two months? You play this series and then what lies ahead, you really don't know. I don't want to really jump the gun. I've kept it this way for the last 4-5 years and it's been very simple and it's worked for me. Why change anything that's working for you?" Ashwin added.

**Down the memory lane**

Playing his 98th Test, Ashwin did speak about the darkest phase of his career when he felt that he was hitting a "bottomless pit". "For me, life has been all about ups and downs and for me the lowest point was the phase between 2018 and 2019. I was the ICC Cricketer of the Year and I was on top of the world and from there to actually go to a really, really bottomless pit, was a very dark time in my life," Ashwin told Kumble. Someone who has been a fierce competitor, Ashwin said that was

the phase when he really didn't know if he would ever be able to derive the joy of playing cricket. It was in 2018, when his abdominal injury prevented him from giving his best against England on a rank turner at Southampton, a Test India lost. At the end of the year, the series against Australia was equally bad as he didn't compete in full series after bowling 86 overs in the first Test in Adelaide, forcing the then skipper Virat Kohli to urge him to do "course correction". While Ashwin didn't take any names, it was the same phase that he spoke about when he didn't know the way to make a comeback. "Generally I am not someone who is fazed by the downs of life because when I really have a good day, I just talk to my parents, my wife and watch good movie and go to sleep. When I am down, I am not really beaten and I do think about it and always come out on the other side of it. "But that was a really, really dark tunnel for me as I didn't know what hit me and how I got placed there. And then I had a couple of injuries, adductor strain and it was a really dark phase and when I thought, I was almost done then," he revealed.

# Ayhika, Sreeja stun top two ranked from China



AYHIKA MUKHERJEE



SREEJA AKULA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Busan (South Korea), Feb 16:** Ayhika Mukherjee and Sreeja Akula stunned the world's top two players, Sun Yingsha and Wang Yidi, in their respective singles matches to rattle the mighty China before the Indian women's table tennis team narrowly fell short in the World Team Championships here Friday. Ranked a lowly 155, Mukherjee played the match of her life to pull off a stunning 12-10, 2-11, 13-11, 11-6 win over World No.1 Sun in the opening singles of the group stage contest. It was the first ever loss for Sun at the team

event of World Championships, summing up the enormity of Ayhika's achievement. The unexpected win provided a massive boost to Sreeja, who made the day even more memorable for Indian table tennis by blanking World No.2 Wang Yidi in straight games 11-7, 11-9, 13-11 in the third singles. However, star player Manika Batra losing both her singles and Ayhika going down in the fifth and deciding singles meant off a stunning 12-10, 2-11, 13-11, 11-6 win over World No.1 Sun in the opening singles of the group stage contest. It was the first ever loss for Sun at the team

# India eves assured of historic BATC medal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Shah Alam (Malaysia), Feb 16:** Indian women shuttlers assured themselves of a historic first-ever Badminton Asia Team Championships medal by cruising to a 3-0 win over Hong Kong but their male counterparts failed to replicate the feat, going down narrowly 2-3 to Japan in the quarterfinals here Friday. After stunning top seeds China to top the group stage, the India women blanked Hong Kong riding on wins from double Olympic-medallist PV Sindhu, Ashmita Chaliha and the doubles pair of Ashwini Ponappa and Tanisha Crasto. The Indian women shuttlers will now face top seed Japan, who beat China 3-2 in another quarterfinal. The Indian men produced a gallant effort but a nervous Kidambi Srikanth imploded in the end, blowing away a 19-12 lead in the third game of the deciding fifth match as they fell short against a second-string Japan in a tightly-contested quarterfinal. India had won two bronze medals in men's team event in the 2016 and 2020 editions. Returning from a long injury layoff, Sindhu



Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponappa in action during their match at Badminton Asia Team Championships

registered a hard-fought 21-7, 16-21, 21-12 win over a lower-ranked

Lo Sin Yan Happy. The women's doubles combi-

nation of Tanisha and Ponnappa then doubled the lead by getting the better of World No.18 combination of Yeung Nga Ting and Yeung Pui Lam 21-10, 21-14 in 35 minutes. Ashmita wrapped up the tie with a comfortable 21-12, 21-13 triumph over Yeung Sum Yee, assuring the team of at least a bronze. For the Indian men, it turned out to be a pulsating contest even though Japan, the 2016 finalists, were without their top players - World No.6 Kodai Narko and 2021 World Champion doubles pair of Takuro Hoki and Yugo Kobayashi. HS Prannoy produced yet another spirited fight back as he recovered from 9-19 down in the second game after losing the opener. He even held game points twice but it was not to be as Kento Nishimoto managed to upstage the Indian. After a 64-minute battle, it was World No.12 Nishimoto, who walked away with a 21-16, 26-24 win to give Japan a 1-0 lead in the five-match rubber. World No.1 pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty then dished out a splendid show to thwart World

No.30 Kenya Mitsuhashi and Hiroki Okamura 21-15, 21-17. Lakshya Sen then outlasted Koko Watanabe, ranked 20th, 21-19, 22-20 and broke into a short jig as the win gave India a 2-1 lead. MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila, however, couldn't seal the match, going down 17-21, 15-21 to scratch pair of Akira Koga and Kazuki Shibata as Japan clawed back. With the tie evenly poised at 2-2, Srikanth was entrusted with the job of taming his nemesis Kento Momota, a two-time former World Champion who has beaten the Indian 13 times in 16 meetings. The odds were against Srikanth. The Indian put up a determined effort only to blow it away in the end. Srikanth was 16-11 up after a tooth and nail battle and closed out the opening game. After the change of ends, Momota got his act together and dictated the terms in the rallies to roar back into the contest. In the deciding game, Srikanth recovered from a 0-3 deficit to zoom to a 19-12 lead but then tragedy struck as he made too many mistakes at the net, allowing the Japanese to reel off eight straight points to eventually seal the match.

# Dipa, Pranati qualify for vault finals at Cairo Gymnastics World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Cairo, Feb 16:** Star Indian gymnasts Dipa Karmakar and Pranati Nayak qualified for the vault final of the FIG Apparatus World Cup, a Paris Olympics qualifying event, here Friday. Dipa scored an aggregate of 13.449 points to finish third in the qualification round and seal her spot in the finals. Pranati qualified for the finals after finishing seventh with a score of 13.166. Dipa returned to the National Championships to win gold in all-around event and a silver each in the vault and uneven bars. Pranati had won gold in the vault and bronze in balance beam.

# LAST MINUTE GOAL HELPS INDIA BEAT IRELAND

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** A lustre India survived a mighty scare but eventually beat lower-ranked Ireland 1-0 through a Gurjant Singh strike in the final minute of their FIH Pro League match here Friday. Ireland frustrated the Indians for most part of the match with resolute defending but Gurjant saved the blushes for the home side as his powerful shot from the top of the striking circle in the 60th minute beat the Irish goalkeeper. India also failed to convert any of their six penalty corners. The Indians had a sloppy start and lacked the same level of energy which they showed in Thursday's 10-goal thriller against Australia. Ireland, on the other hand, had more ball pos-



session and were successful in cutting off Indian balls inside their circle. India had the first real chance in the form of a penalty corner but captain Harmanpreet Singh's

flick was saved in the goal-line by an alert Irish defender. Ireland had their first chance in the 11th minute but Matthew Nelson's reverse hit was kept out by India goalkeeper Krishan Bahadur Pathak.

The Indians put up a much better show in the second quarter as they slowly and steadily got back into the contest. India secured two more PCs in a span of five minutes but on both occasions. India's struggle continued after the change of ends as they failed to breach the Irish defence despite making a number of circle penetrations. It looked the deadlock was finally broken when Akashdeep found the back of the net from Abhishek's pass but the goal was overturned after Ireland asked for review for an infringement on goalie Carr. The Indians had more ball possession in the third quarter and secured another penalty corner but Amit Rohidas' try was saved by Carr. India next play Spain in Rourkela February 19.

# Subhanshu props Odisha

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 16:** Subhanshu Senapati struck a superb unbeaten century to help Odisha reach 314/4 at stumps on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy Elite Group D encounter with Delhi at the Jamia Millia Cricket Ground in Delhi, Friday. Senapati (109 batting, 184b, 13x4) was accompanied by experienced Biplab Samantray (40 batting, 97b, 5x4) when the bails were taken off. Skipper Shantanu Mishra (76, 129b, 10x4) also chipped in with a half century at the top. Earlier, Odisha, after winning the toss, opted to bat first on a good looking track for the batters. Openers Swastik Samal (38, 40b, 5x4, 1x6) and Shantanu started off well putting on a 58-run stand

with a healthy run-rate. After Swastik's departure, the run-rate dipped a bit before No.3 batter Sandeep Pattanaik (12) got out after a 27-run stand. Shantanu was then joined by Senapati and the duo played with caution stitching 80 runs for the third wicket before the Odisha skipper returned to the pavilion. Govinda Poddar (27) then joined Senapati at the middle. They were looking good until Sumit Mathur (2/67), who made his first-class debut in this match, disturbed Poddar's stumps to break an impressive 68-run partnership. Senapati and Biplab then ensured Odisha of no further hiccups until the umpires called off play for the day with an unbroken 81-run stand. Pranshu Vijayran (2/64) was the other wicket-taker for the home team.